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## WHAT SHOULD BE ON THE CHRISTIAN'S T-SHIRT?

*For me, two experiences this month have come together to birth this question: a family reunion & a theological colloquy.*

The T-shirt said "Gangwish Reunion, 1995" with the ets chaim (tree of life) as background. All six sibling families wore this logo, but the families were color-coded--Loree's, ours, being pink. Colorful diversity in unity. Every five years in old-hometown Nebraska....At "The Baptismal Formula: Father, Son, & Holy Spirit?" --Craigville Theological Colloquy XII, which ends tomorrow--we don't have a celebrative T-shirt; but if we did, its legend might be "The Trinity" (on which we agreed), with different colors representing the spectrum of emphases, convictions, opinions among us as to how best, here & now, to commmunicate the Christian vision & experinece of God: unity in diversity.

1 Wearing my reunion T-shirt, I got to musing about the most adequate logo or legend to put on T-shirts of the religions. For Judaism, "Shema,...Adonai echad" (which can be translated a half dozen ways, but basically affirms monotheism, that "our God" is "[the only] One"). For Pure Land Buddhism, "Namu Amida Butsu," the Buddha name whose repetition assures salvation for the common people (without other ritual & toilful learning). For Christianity, *what*?

2 The Christian T-shirt must (1) witness to the essence of the Faith (2) in a shorthand that intrigues. "The Trinity" passes the first test but, as a surd to the uniformed, fails the second. Well, what say you? Try this in a group: Everyone write a suggestion; when all have written, each defend her/his suggestion....At least for this Thinksheet, my offering is this: **"God gave his Son" (John 3:16)**. It passes the second test: While it may repulse some readers, it does intrigue. And I think it not too bad (though no words comprehend the Faith) on the first test: it says:

The universe, the gospel, & this sentence all begin with "God," the divine initiative (represented by the masculine "his," the androgens taking the initiative [as, e.g., spermata seek ova]). The fundament of the divine action is giving, for which the basic human response should be gratitude (χάρις *charis* "grace" meaning both gift & gratitude for the gift; in Hebrew, *todah* living). As for the divine gift at the heart of Christianity, it's "his [the **Father**'s] **Son.**" All this becomes known to us through the Holy **Spirit**--which brings us back to "The Trinity," as short-short-hand.

3 Primitive religions maintain **purity** by enforcing taboos. During my brief stretch as a Protestant fundamentalist, the most important taboo was against waffling on "the literal Virgin Birth." That was the Maginot Line, & there was no fall-back position. Questioning or reinterpreting or revisioning the V.B. would get you ostracism. Another, & a biblical (Judg.12.6), purity test is "shibboleth": pronounce it wrong & you're (in the story, literally) dead. This form of the purity sanction operates on what is/not said (commission/omission) & how. Through the decades I've encountered it in many contexts both naive & sophisticated. Always & everywhere it's primitive as a form of pre-rational scrupulousness: the scruple operates automatically, non-rationally (pre-rationally, in instances of thinking after acting on the scruple; cp. "pre-judice," before judging).

Most recently I encountered it yesterday. In plenary, I asked the Colloquy's ecumenical observer, Ellen Charry (a Jew become Christian [Episcopalian] teaching theology in a Protestant [Methodist] seminary, Perkins, SMU) "What do you say as the ninth word of the Doxology ["Praise....him"]?" "Him," says she. And after the session, she told me the cost: She's shunned, orally ostracized, by all her female colleagues. But she considers the persecution a burden necessary to bear, to continue speaking of God as the Bible consistently does, viz. by masculine pronouns.

4 I've mentioned one characteristic of the primitive taboo, viz. it operates automatically. It's two other characteristics are that it operates unexceptionally & severely. As a contrarian Christian, through the years I've not been cowed by purity taboos I've considered crippling to the Cause. Since purity taboos are highly successful in community maintenance, their violation usually ejects the challenger. Two such taboos I've personally experienced as cost are (1) "Thou shalt not say the

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Bible has errors" & "Thou shalt not say 'shit' even when quoting." At my age & life situation, I pay very little for continuing a practice most of my friends, & others in the mainline churches, have discontinued because of purity-sanction pressure, viz., referring to the divine as "he/his/him-self."

5 Either way it's **costly**. You speak as the Bible does ("he"), & you are shunned or, at the minimum, looked down on as not up to speed. But what're the costs of refusing to speak as the Bible does? Here are some:

(1) Cognitive dissonance intrapsychically (personally) & catechetically (in Christian education). (a) If you read much Bible, you'll tend to slide out of the "no he" mode into the "he" mode & will need (if you're under the oppression of the taboo) to slip back into the "no he" mode when you think about what you've read. This shunting (to avoid shunning) back & forth sets up an energy-loss current of static in the brain. (b) When you teach a child to say the 23rd Psalm ("he" 4x in the first strophe, + 1 "his") but not even to think "he" when thinking about the 23rd Psalm, the cognitive dissonance erects a communication barrier in both education & witness. Out of anxiety that they might violate the scruple, children will think/talk even less about God than without the scruple. The stricture will operate consciously if the teacher teaches the taboo directly, & unconsciously if the teacher only models never using masculine pronouns for God.

(2) Alienation from the Bible, which is a strange enough book without setting up a scruple against its way of talking about God. Directly or indirectly, the child/youth/adult gets the message that the Bible's not to be trusted in its speaking about God. The word that the Bible's not to be trusted is the devil's work. ...This Thinksheet's supratitle begins "...to learn the Church's song." To foul up the Church's song is the devil's work in "he"-eliminating butcherings of Scripture ("Inclusive Language Bible") & hymnody ("The New Century Hymnal"). It's painfully difficult to enculture Christians in "the language of Zion," the Church's way of speaking about God, humanity, the world, the future. And this tabooing of "he" only increases the difficulty.

(3) Distraction. Since normal English uses "he/she/it" to refer back (thus, "anaphor") to nouns (names, objects), speakers/writers must distract themselves into using **ab**normal English, & hearers/readers must adjust to the **ab**normalities. Thus the avoidance of "he" for God adds, to cognitive dissonance, *audio*-dissonance: expecting an anaphor after a noun, one gets instead the logically unnecessay (so, tautological) **repetition** of the noun (e.g., to use my Christian T-shirt, "God gave God's Son"; or the liturgical phrase "God God's-self [oh, ugly neologism!] is with us"). Of course the English language will soon reject these farcical implants, but what a price the Church must pay in the interim!

(4) Theo-fragmentation. In the Bible & the biblical religions, "he" is the only term common to, & thus uniting, the divine referencers (viz., God, Father/Son, Lord, King, etc.). "He" is the wheel-center; without it, what you have is a handful of spokes. "The LORD is God" could be only henotheism: Yahweh is our God, Marduk is the Babylonians', etc. Contrast the biblical "The LORD, *he* is God": Deut.4.35, Ps.100.3. (In both passages, the Hebrew "he" is obscured, deleted, in NRSV--no suprise. Another instance of this demasculinizing deletion is Is.42.24: "he" is deleted, but not "his" in "LORD...his ways.") (In Ps.100.3, NRSV drops "he" but retains masculine pronouns in 11 other places. Of course, radical inclusive-language translations of the psalm eliminate the whole dozen, as if applying Shakespeare's "Out, out, damned stain!") (In the NT, the masculine pronouns are widely associated with the Lord Jesus. E.g., Ac.10.36: NRSV retains the Greek in "Jesus Christ, he is Lord"; & "he is Lord" occurs in both Greek & NRSV, Rev.17.14 & [NRSV having "he" twice, the Greek only once] 19.16.)

The other aspect of theo-fragmentation is the inclusive-language split between the Testaments: the OT's "LORD" is demasculized; but in the NT, Jesus' maleness makes demasculinizing of "the Lord" (meaning Jesus) more awkward--so the radical feminists refuse masculine pronouns to Jesus after the resurrection. The Bible itself has no problem: "LORD/Lord" is masculine throughout....The split appears in many guises. A recent poll in a UCC seminary found only 4% willing to use, for Jesus, "the Son of God." Yield "he" for God, & the fallback positions weaken disastrously. The centerless wheel loses more & more spokes. +

(5) Compromised polemic. Surrendering "he" for God compromises the mainline Christian witness vis-a-vis (1) **un**critical Christian consciousness on the right & (2) **hyper**critical antiChristian consciousness on the left. The Protestant right preaches, e.g., the monstrosity called "creation science" (which is neither an intelligent handling of the creation tradition, nor scientific); & the Catholic right abuses Scripture to proclaim its lateborn doctrine of the sacredness of human life, esp. against abortion. The mainline has turned America's campuses over to evangelicals & fundamentalists; evangelism has dried up; missions have been reduced to dogoodism. (The mainline has been converted to "multiculturalism," the doctrine that one culture is as good as another. Christian evangelism/missions proceed on the conviction that all other cultures are inferior in the sense that one who hasn't the Good News is inferior, in not having the Good News, to one who has & who is called to eliminate the other's inferiority by sharing the Good News. If you have no money & I have $1, I am superior to you; if I give it to you, I am inferior to you; if I give you 50¢, we are equal. Two crude illustrations, yes. But I'm putting starkly multiculturalism's threat to our Faith.

And a third illustration: Today, Mayflower II sailed from Boston to Provincetown to celebrate the 375th anniversary of the second white landfall in the Western hemisphere (& the first time that ship carried passengers: no motor, took a special act of Congress). The natives were hostile, as they weren't on the occasion of Mayflower I's first landing in Provincetown. A Jewish speaker denounced the band for playing "exculsionary" (i.e., Christian) music--whereupon the band's singer shouted, "The Lord Jesus Christ was a Jew!"--whereupon somebody jerked out the PA cord. Indians (Native Americans) who think Plymouth Rock should have landed on the Mayflower did a war dance against the landing. Gays (P-town, as its called hereabouts, having a large homosexual community) did their usual demonstration thing, as did some other "minorities." Yes, it was (unintentionally) farcical; but not funny is the unholy alliance of forces "exclusionary" of religion, & especially of Christianity, as Stephen L. Carter details in his THE CULTURE OF DISBELIEF (Doubleday/93), & the widespread betrayal of Christianity from within the mainline, as detailed in Thos. C. Oden's REQUIEM: A LAMENT IN THREE MOVEMENTS (Abingdon/95). (Depend on it: Nobody who's given up calling God "he" will speak up in defense of the Mayflower II 375th Anniversary Committee even though the committee was meticulous in historical details, including the pageant of the Signing of the Mayflower Compact aboard Mayflower II.)

(Two days later.) My today's CCT Letter to the Editor attacks a result of hypercritical consciousness on the left (viz., public education's cultural doughnut with its spiritually-religiously hollow center). My polemic is uncompromised by any apologetic attitude toward Scripture such as the anti-"he"-for-God folk have.

(6) Ersatz "prayer." Third-person texts having "he" for God are, to avoid the masculine, converted into second-person ("you"). Besides producing inauthentic prayers (praying for a wrong reason), this ploy misses the spirit of many biblical prayers (Heb., "tephillim"). E.g., Hannah's prayer ("tephillah," 1Sam.2.1-10) uses the masculine pronouns for God a dozen times! The UCC Statement of Faith was converted, because of the acquired allergy against masculine pronouns for God, into a phony prayer (wrongly called "doxological")--phony, because the reason for the conversion was inauthentic.

## Atheism has more rights than religion

In your editorial "Speech in search of a miracle," you enunciate a principle which on its face seems sober but on examination proves to be silly:

"Any prayer in public school would have to allow for the beliefs of everyone in the school," including "the atheists, who have rights, too."

What the atheists want, and have, is what the president calls schools as "religion-free zones" – free not as in free expression, but free as in absent. That is the situation he rightly describes as intolerable and un-American.

In its foundation and character, the United States is the most specifically religious nation, and tolerant of irreligion. The public schools should represent, and engender, both truths. Religion is to be appropriately recognized and taught, and atheism should be tolerated. But worse than the reverse now obtains: Atheism has rights, but religion is not even tolerated.

Your principle is an impediment to realism. If the public schools are to recover from the present insanity vis-a-vis religion, atheists' belief that the schools should remain religion-absent zones cannot be "allowed."

Perhaps we can begin to make progress if we can get beyond your ideological delusion.

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(7) Neologistic ephemerality is a seventh cost of refusing to speak of God as the Bible does. New expressions (e.g., "Godself") replace old (here, "himself," which Newspeakers become amnesiac about), but these ad hoc coinages soon perish under language's conservative waves. Pathetically, the innovaters would change language in the hope that those who find the old symbol-system (language) opaque may gain understanding of the Faith; but we who retain the biblical—traditional language would train the ignorant to understand it; further, we claim that changing the symbol system changes the religion, so the new initiates, rather than thus gaining an understanding of the Faith, are entering at best a different version of the Faith, at worst a new religion.

(8) Psychosociologism. When the Bible's consistent pronominal way of speaking of God (viz., "he/his/him-self") is flipped aside as mere cultural husk on the kernel of the divine, what in Scripture cannot be so cavalierly neutralized (or neutered)? Those who accept this huge betrayal of the Bible find it easier to play fast & lose with scriptures they sniff at: only the first adultery is really stressful....Comfortable evil companions of this mindset are philosophical historicism & moral relativism.

(9) Fading personalism. A divinity not "he" or "she" can only be impersonal, "it." In biblical religion, "she" is generically absorbed into "he" (to speak historically): "she" cannot be recovered without violating monotheism; & the sense of the Person of God cannot be retained without "he." Proof? It's not being retained by the anti-"he" folk; they're more & more open to New Age impersonalism, especially where Hindic & Sinic themes are potent.

(10) "Loss of transcendence," a quotation from the heart of the situation-analysis in the Hartford Appeal for Theological Affirmation (1975). In Christianity, the absence of "she" for the divine does not reduce the sense of **immanence**, which is lively in the Incarnation, the Resurrection, the Residence of the Holy Spirit in God's people, & the awaited Parousia; but the abandonment of "he" does push mainline churches to abandon, or at least depotentiate, **transcendence**, that ours is a top-down religion of creation, rule (God's "kingdom"), providence, guidance, judgment, mercy, redemption, consummation (activities associated with the androgens--initiative, aggressiveness, action-decisiveness). The deity who remains after the Bible has been poured through the radical-feminist filter is a God to be loved but not feared. Feminese (the language of radical feminism) has no place for a masculine vocabulary or the Cross, & no respect for the genetic code & immune systems of the traditional biblical language.

(11) Loss of "truth in advertising." "Ethnic cleansing," as now in Bosnia, is the coerced removal of a population: "Bible cleansing" is the expurgation of "he"-for-God from the Bible or at least from the pronominal way one refers to the biblical God. Remember that Gray Panthers' button "FIGHT TRUTH DECAY"? This morning I read in GATES OF PRAYER (p.527) this translation of a Hebrew phrase using the usual Hebrew word for truth, *emeth*: "everlasting His faithfulness." The honest use of language, including documentary integrity, is a moral as well as intellectual concern, & thus also spiritual ("faithfulness" as a node word for the divine-human covenantal relationship)....The God we Christians are to advertise is not a hoked up, genderless philosophical abstract but the self-revealed, specific, biblical God. Foundationalism in the negative sense is the laying of some other foundation (1Cor.3.11), e.g., "the god of the philosophers" (Pascal) or "women's experience."

(12) Symbolic reductionism. It's a linguistic category-error to treat a **symbol** (which, as Tillich rightly said, participates in the reality) as though it were only a **sign** (& therefore optional, as when one says "Other terms could point to the same reality"). A god no longer referenced as "he" is not the same God," for "he" is a symbol & not a mere sign of biblical religion. In Muslim/Christian dialog, Muslims challenge us to express our faith in God without the Trinity, which they hear not as Three-in-One but as Three, i.e., tritheism. We could make this concession if, instead of being names (& thus symbols), "Father, Son, Holy Spirit" were only optional metaphors (& thus signs). In the Colloquy XII debate on naming the Trinity, both sides respected this difference by condemning the current practice of some UCC churches in taking "unilateral action" in changing the baptismal formula. But one debater argued that "Where the formula [Father, Son, Holy Spirit] does not communicate, it's effect is demonic." Would he apply that to Muslim/Christian dialog (where the Trinity certainly does not "communicate")? Rather, one should ask the

deeper question as to why the formula does not, to some people, "communicate." Two obvious replies are (1) that some who would like to understand have been un/mis/informed, & (2) that some have contrary commitments (e.g., Muslims) blocking trinitarian education. The second group includes women who've been "consciousness-raised" to feel "excluded" by the first two names in the Trinity. The truth is that human beings can be taught to feel included or excluded, depending on what their teachers are up to. I'm up to teaching that the gospel communicated through the biblical way of speaking excludes no one & that changing that language excludes (1) canonical-classical Christianity & (2) me.

(13) False concessionism. I refuse Mary Daly's perversion that "If God is male, males are gods." Those who think male when hearing "Father" & "Son" in the church's language think wrong, & hurt from ignorance or (worse) miseducation. God indeed came only as male (the Incarnation), & no monkeying with language can obscure that fact in Christian Faith; but the symbolic affirmation is that "**he**" refers to gender, not to sex--& the effort to eliminate God's gender by ceasing to refer to him as "he" threatens the incarnational root of the Faith. (When a study is made, I've no doubt it'll show a high correlation between dropping "he" & disbelieving in the Incarnation.)

But falsely conceding "he" occurs under the same pressures as falsely conceding **patriarchy**. Eugene Wherli's Colloquy Biblestudies are showing how thoroughly our Faith roots in "Father"--e.g., in Mt. & Jn. Christianity is essentially patriarchal, & to rub out "Father" would in effect rub out Jesus. I studied with some Christians who falsely conceded, rejected, "God" on the ground that to moderns it doesn't communicate & is, moreover, offensive (now, additionally, because it's masculine). "Flee or fight," said Freud. If we flee from "he" & "Father," we flee from the biblical "God." The human abuse of patriarchy is no excuse for (1) eliminating the divine Patriarch or (2) failing to use the divine patriarchy as a model for the proper use, and against the abuse, of human patriarchy (viz., androgenic initiative). Our society is now feministically crippled: girls become women, but boys find it much harder to become men. Theology should be therapeutic to societal ills, not conformable to them....But Jesus relativizes, qualifies, male authority with his shocking sayings about the family (e.g., Mt.8.21-22; 10.34-36 & 37; 12.46-50---& parallels). The law of love supervenes over all power-arrangements based on hormones, habits, & histories. But this supervention more often purifies than cancels: Jesus was more reformer than revolutionary, & a literal reading of his hyperboles overweights his revolutionary side. By this overweighting, gender feminism modernizes him into a feministist who condemned "patriarchy" & top-down, hierarchical religion.

(14) Erosion of Christian liberty. Ellen Charry is willing, in the exercise of her freedom to speak of God as the Bible does ("he"), to pay the price of suffering shunning-pressure to cut back on her biblical liberty. When Galatian Christians suffered similarly, Paul called the reductionists "false-brothers" set to "spy out" & resist such liberty in Christ as they considered excessive. Straight out, Paul said they were trying to "enslave" the church to their illiberal strictures (Gal.2.4). "Not for one moment" should "we submit [subject ourselves]" to these pressures, lest the "the truth of the gospel," in which Christians should "continue unchanged," be compromised (next v.). To you, does dropping "he" for God seem a small matter & no crimp in Christian freedom? Notice, in these two vv., Paul's accusation that the false teachers are spreading their poison "surreptitiously," "stealing in" to "spy out" & reduce freedom. My interpretation of the "he"-deniers is more generous: "Father [sic], forgive them, for they know not what they do."....In v.5, the second verb communicates Paul's concern that gospel truth remain unchanged for, & in, successive generations (Vulgate as "perman..."). The essence of tradition is faithful & accurate conveyance of truth you have "received" & on which you "stand," now & for the children's children (1Cor.15.1). Radical feminism says that "he"ing God is sexist, but this movement will pass. If we do not now accept the burden that the Bible is sexist (by their definition), if we do not stand on the biblical freedom to refer to God as "he," what will the children's children think of the Bible, the Christian heritage-tradition, & us? Of such **long-term** questioning I hear little from those who submit to the pressure to cut back on how the Bible speaks of God. +

(15) Torturing the English language. Every language in action is a structured flow revealing the particular language's unique mind. Some languages do not have pronouns, some languages have genderless pronouns, English has gendered pronouns ("he/she/it"). Since in our religion all the deity's names & titles are masculine, the mind of English requires the masculine pronouns for deity. The effort to elide these pronouns temporarily tortures, but cannot damage, the mind of English; but what can be damaged is the religion. Adducing different minds in other languages--e.g., Korean, Turkish, Hungarian--is irrelevant to the mind, the deep structure, of what was the founding, & should be the official, language of the United States...."Creation science" is an embarrassment to the Faith, for it's science-&-religion ignorant: dropping "he" for our God is an embarrassment to the Faith, for it's language ignorant.

(16) Abetting the triple attack on the Bible's names of & titles for God. In my previous figure, the Bible's names & titles for God (all being masculine) are the spokes of a wheel whose hub is the (Hebrew/Aramaic/Greek) masculine pronouns for God. Without that hub, the spokes are only functionless sticks.

Giving up "he" weakens one's defense against three thrusts of ultrafeminism: (1) Reducing the frequency of use of the names & titles (to decrease the sense of the divine masculinity); (2) Substituting, for the names & titles, genderless titles (e.g., "Holy One," which is rare in Scripture but nauseatingly frequent in radical feminist liturgy); & (3) Elevating biblical feminine similes/metaphors into titles (e.g., "as a mother" becomes "Mother [God]"). All this mucking about with how we are to speak to & of God enervates our speaking to, of, & for God. The intellectual effort to be faithful to all these conversions is, for many, just not worth it: they would rather avoid speech vis-a-vis deity. Ergo, less power, less witness, less joy.

(17) "Consequential [third-party] damages." This legal phrase is coeval with the political-ethical phrase "unintended consequences." My listing here of some of the costs of dumping "he" cannot be comprehensive no matter how many baleful effects I at this moment think to mention: I, you, cannot know them all. The litigants in a divorce proceeding do not intend to damage the third party, viz. their child--but in this instance, "consequential damage" is inevitable. Those who with compassion for "hurting women" have dumped "he" are responsible for the consequent cognitive dissonance spun off, on third parties, both from their action & from the resulting theological controversy in the churches' schools & congregations. Are enough women stopping hurting to make this mess worthwhile, &--unintended consequence & consequential damage!--are some women hurting more? As to the latter, how is a competent woman who says "he" to become a pastor in a "liberated" church, or a teacher in a "liberated" school (especially seminary)? Be such women ever so affirmative-action for the feminine side of God, they are blocked by their refusal to join in the "he"-haters' negative action against the masculine side of God. The inclusionary Furies are exclusionary of pro-"he"--ers' career development.

(18) The scrupling of free association. A computer program (such as I once pre-designed) on "body" free associates within & among relevant semantic domains as synapses fire in learned patterns. So would a program on "goddess," which would include the feminine pronouns; & one on "god," which would include the masculine pronouns. Ultrafeminism's anti-"he" scruple, in blocking free association within the semantic field of the biblical God, impedes prayer, meditation, study, community, & witness.

(19) Misfiltration. Instead of filtering "he" out, what my Christian T-shirt ("God gave his Son," §2 of this Thinksheet) preaches is that the biblical God acts on "feminine" values (e.g., servant-power rather than over-power: M.10.42-45). When "he" is filtered out, the loss is of both the "masculine" power-over & of the "feminine" servant-power. Christian education should filter out not "he" but non- & anti-Christian notions of masculinity. Instead of hacking away at the biblical language, we should be teaching what it means to be a Christian man. In attacking "The Legacy of Patriarchy in Jewish Life" (her subtitle), Aviva Cantor in her (1995) JEWISH WOMEN, JEWISH MEN calls for a society "based not on power but on female values." From within Judaism, she's a case of misfiltration. In Christianity, what's to be filtered out is violations of the revelation & vision of the masculine God who incorporates feminine "values."