

A disadvantaged student of mine--older, in my Spring'78 college-level course--in creating his own list a questions (as instructed) to answer on an examination, chose as #4 this: "Do you believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible?" His answer: "...I would have to be stark, raving mad. The book was created to be a guiding light, especially when Jesus came on the scene in human form." Our minds must be free to "seek knowledge, wisdom through understanding," and not be "locked into a time machine and roam around in darkness." Here's his #6: "Do you believe in the virgin birth?"

Now, this is not a theological thinksheet. I'm not concerned about his or anyone's else doctrine of the virgin birth, in this thinksheet. I'm concerned only with how his answer to his question #6 reveals the connotative force of a word, the word "man."...In black English, "the Man" means the human source, collective and individual, of oppression; biblical synonym, "Pharoah." But my student happened to be white, poor-white (though the course, "Introduction to the Bible," had in it more blacks than whites).

As you read his answer (here indented), think-feel the connotata, political and economic and social and religious; think-feel the presence of the "-isms" (sexism, classism, etatism, racism) not in this student but in the society he grew up in, our American society; think-feel the oppression in his elative-negative use of "man."\*

Jesus doubtless had a biological father, but the Christians spoke of his virgin birth so that he'd not be inferior to the culture-former of that world, Alex. the Great, said to be virgin-born. But nevertheless Mother Mary was a "virgin" because Father Joseph was no Philip of Macedon. "Virgin to me means not knowing a man. Man to me means a leader, a protector, provider, supporter. Since Jesus was born of the poor, the rejected and despised, we see that his mother really didn't know a man. Jesus' birth" to me means more than physical; it was "a new mind coming into form,...a mind whose mother came from a society that didn't have a protector, a leader, a society that didn't have any type of guidance.

"So I can say yes that Jesus was born of a woman (society) that never knew a man,  
one that had no guidance,  
one that was 'pure,'" virginal.

Human speech is heavy with empirical-emotional-paradigmatic freight. It's dangerous, and glorious, a truth known especially well by imprudent blabbers like me--a truth to be ever in mind and on heart while preaching, teaching, counseling, and just plain conversing.

\*Not from anything I said in class!