

RIGORISM/LATITUDINARIANISM: A note on the current adiabatic controversy about "inclusive language"

Permanence/change is a permanent and ever-changing category of the human mind and societies. Without continuity, death: without elasticity, flexibility, adaptability, growth--also death. Every tradition is (1) sufficient insofar as it functions to sustain its society, and (2) defective in that no tradition can succeed in incorporating all other traditions without sacrificing its identity.

1. Elasticity within what? Peoplehood, says Judaism. Discipleship, says Christianity, which became so elastic that it lost its Jewish identity. (According to Acts 15.28f, the Holy Spirit doesn't want us pagan Jews for Jesus to violate three food-rules which soon came to be senseless for Christians, who gave up the effort to remain in Judaism: another religion (yet, at core, not another) came of it.)

2. "Nothing's perfect and nobody's perfect." Process theology has extended this bromide to include God and, by implication, religions. So Christianity is not perfect, but improvable: is it also perfectible? At least under this proposition, no. We can retain perfectionism as impossible possibility (Mt. 5.48) while conceding that our religion, as well as all the other historical religions, is limited in elasticity: stretch it too far, and it (1) loses its identity, (2) becomes something else.

3. Sun Moon proposes to improve the Christian religion by delivering it from the embarrassment of its sexist leadership-vision. Says he, since we are as male/female in the image of God (Gn.1.27) and coequal as sexes in Christ (Gal.3.28), and since the first human pair who sinned prefigure a human pair who do not sin (vig., Mr. and Mrs. Messiah), the Second Coming must not and will not be of a male only: it will be of the Perfect Couple (possibly, Mr. and Mrs. Sun Moon). Why, if it's unnecessary, have to put up with the scandal of male particularity for both Comings? Why should not the Second Coming make up the defect in the First Coming? The argument is true and heretical: I prefer to abide with the scandal of male particularity, that only Jesus will Come Again, be the Danielic-Enochic "Son of Man," fulfil the messianic tradition. In the whole biblical tradition, the dominant representation of the divine is masculine. This I believe to be a permanent, necessary, scandal of particularity. Cosmetic efforts to put a better face on this embarrassment are acceptable to me, but not radical facial surgery amounting to a new face (which Sun Moon and many other cultists attempt).

4. Drafters of confessions of faith should begin, if they intend to remain Christian, with a list of unnegotiable words (unnegotiable because to elide them would alienate the creed/confession/faith-statement from (1) the Bible, our faith's root-literature, (2) fellow-believers in Christian communions other than one's own, and (3) seekers who are looking for a church that has visible ties to Christian tradition and to "the Church throughout the world"). In the list should be favorite words of our Lord: "Father," "Son of Man," "Kingdom of God" (not some other translation of *malkuth/basileia*, the biblical words incorporating the word "King"). In the list should be also the Church's favorite titles for our Lord, viz., "Lord" and "Savior." Note that not some, but all of these essential words, are sexist: cleaning up the Christian language is a pitiful, dangerous pipe-dream. As Sun Moon has proved, it is possible to reconstruct Christianity with "inclusive language;" I for one consider the effort bizarre to the point of betrayal and blasphemy.

5. The world is on the verge of a spiritual conflagration, and some new world-religion with inclusive language may emerge to replace the predominance of Christianity, from whose origins the world is drifting farther and farther away. But I doubt it.