

"FATHER": METAPHORS AS CLEAN/DIRTY
VIS-A-VIS MOVEMENTS

----- Elliott #1739

SEQUENCE? Translate personal "Father" to less personal "God" to impersonal "process/energy."

Modern science handles the universe/life impersonally and has had sufficient success to give this movement prestige so great that whatever is unconformed to it is disrespectable, *outré*, shameful, illiterate, obscurantist, obstructionist, and even (with the clout of the sanction of purity) dirty. The personal God is, in this perspective, the dirtiest notion, the most ~~dia~~metrical and so the most offensive etiology.

As U.S. public schools have bought science's impersonalism as etiology (explaining *nothing* as from/of the personal God), current challenges to this hegemony (*viz.*, prayer in the schools and "scientific creationism") are met with vitriol: theists are attacking public-school piety, which is theoretically agnostic but functionally atheist. At best, thanks to linguistic philosophy, "God" is let in as a metaphor for the warm, life-affirmative energies and structures of nature and society.

I praise the failed efforts (none being successful) to reconcile theism (=the personal God) with science. Whiteheadians translated "person" (a word dirty to science) into "process" (a word central to science), but theists among them paid too heavy a price for so little success in the struggle for respectability: the lamb of theism lies down inside the lion of scientism. ((Wieman, first Whiteheadian to gain a following for trying to sustain the tradition of the Church in dialog with science ("naturalistic theism"), was ashamed of my out-and-out personalism. In six courses he marked all my papers "A--but must you continue to believe in a personal God?"))

How does all the above connect with the title of this thinksheet? I lay out first what's in the title: (1) Movements (feminism, in this case) use the sanction of purity (along with, each movement, virtually all possible sanctions). "In" things (viewpoints, ideas, persons, relations) are clean, and "out" things are dirty. (2) This purity/impurity motivating is both conscious (rhetorical) and unconscious. (3) As metaphors are the psycho-engines of movements, studying a movement's metaphors and antimetaphors and metametaphors is an essential way to get at a movement's dynamics. (3) In every movement (and sub-culture and culture and even civilization), certain metaphors become signals of in/out, including/excluding. (E.g., in communists cells in the early 1930s I quickly learned the OK/not-OK words.) Social psychology calls this use of language "positive/negative identity signaling." (4) Sclerotic feminists in the Church hold "Father" to be a dirty word for God, and clamor for its elimination (even, in some cases, in Bible reading--as my own ears have heard in church!).

What irritated me into writing this thinksheet? Church yesterday (31July83). The preacher read L.11.1-13, which is a "Father" catena, under the "father" as control-metaphor. Since "Father" was our Lord's central metaphor for God (and, indeed, his distinct contribution to theology proper in Late Judaism), how natural that the early Christians liked to string sayings and stories on "Father-father." How natural for Jesus to say (vs.2), "When you pray, say: 'Father.'" Well, when the preacher got around to asking us to pray the UCC Statement of Faith, he asked us (in print) not to say "Father" (but instead, "God"--as the Exec.Council's doxological version). Strange disobedience, esp. in view of the sermon's being on being faithful to the content of the Faith.

Down with reductionisms in science, feminism, and all other movements.