

Dorothy Payne, now (Mar/84) moved to Cape Cod and continuing to lead many retreats for women in various parts of the country, stimulates me to do more writing on the male/female divide/union. I thank her for (among other bibliography) two splendid little things that'd escaped my notice: Pendle Hill Pamphlet 191 (1973), by Erminie Huntress Lantero, "Feminine Aspects of Divinity" (here, EHL); and a little Paulist/73 book, J. Edgar Bruns' GOD AS WOMAN, WOMAN AS GOD (here, JEB). Other alphabetized works here are RCW (Rachel Conrad Wahlberg, JESUS ACCORDING TO A WOMAN, Paulist/75) and LS (Leonard Swidler, BIBLICAL AFFIRMATIONS OF WOMAN, Westminster/79).

1. The numinous or divine is everywhere/always experienced as "more than" we are and in some sense(s) calling us to become "more than" we have been. Now, each sex is "more than" the other if only in the sense of being other-while-nevertheless-human; so no deity of either sex can answer to the devotee's yearning that the divine be "more than" we as humans (of one sex or both sexes) are: the logic of devotion is divine sexual bipolarity (in addition to the bipolarity of somehow comprehending life/death). To put it another way, your god is too small if not also a goddess, and vice versa.

2. The most direct form of this divine sexual bipolarity is the divine couple. I suspect that such a couple is behind, though historically far behind, the "us" of Gn.1.26f: "Let's make human beings, and make them like us, resembling us in being male and female" (my paraphrase). Not insignificantly, that's one of the two great texts of biblical feminism, the other equality-before-God text being Gal.3.27f: "no difference...between men and women" in "union with Christ." (This Providential leveling of the sexes face-to-face with God is the divine sanction Toqueville, in his 1,000-p. DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA, uses politically to explain both America and his own philosophy of history.) However we render particular texts, it's clear that both OT and NT see the sexes as equal under the creating-judging hand of God. It is just as clear that, in this the theoretical dimension, the biblical is the best metaphysically grounded tradition against sexism. Yes, "Many a slip twixt cup and lip": ain't it awful how far we Jews and Christians are from having lived up to our doctrine (even though in practice we compare favorably with the other major human traditions)? But badmouthing the Bible is self-defeating, and ignorant if not dishonest, for Jewish and Christian feminists (female and male). I hope we hear the last of it soon.

3. Here, from various cultures-religions, are a few divine couples: Isis/Osiris, Seth/Nephthys (Isis the equal of not only Osiris but also Ra); Yahu/Anathbethel (of the Elephantine Jewish temple; she as "Lady of Heaven," consort of "the God of Heaven," Anathyahu meaning 'consort of Yahu'; and see Jer. 17 for the Jawistic opposition to "the Queen of Heaven," whose image at Bethel and elsewhere was the cow-calf); Inanna/Nut (I., patronness of civilization), Yo/Elat; Cybele/Attis; Baal/Astarte(Ashtaroth); Aphrodite/Ares; Venus/Mars; Baal/Asherah (the divine dyad that got Jezebel into big trouble)...Again, some single deities seem to be, as it were, divine couples: Ishtar with her beard (in the NYC Met.Mus. of Art, see the many bearded statues of Pharaoh Hatshepsu in her room--the reasoning being, in conception, not entirely different)...And some goddesses are so independent of gods as to remind me of the old joke: "I've got a dog that howls, a parrot that swears, and a cat that stays out all night: why should I want a husband?" Hathor; Artemis; Hepat; Pallas Athena (though she was hermaphroditic, and virtually metasexual--i.e., beyond sex, like the God-Spirit in Jn.4, whom Jesus revealed to the 2nd most widely sexually experienced woman in the NT)...As for double-sexed gods, Heracles (of course) Hermaphroditus; and, in Hinduism, Siva and Kali...Our earliest human dyadic (male/female) representation is breasts/horns. In the title of #1826, I've used "WOMB/ARMS": womb encompasses, arms embrace--only the woman can do both. The male threat to the female is single: embracing, raping (in all senses of overwhelming by superior musculature): the female threat to the male is double, both encompassing and embracing (double overwhelming). The single most important negative fact in male/female relations is that the male feels more afraid*of the female than the female does of the male. In feminist writing, I find virtually no recognition of this

*W.C.Fields: Women are like elephants to me; I like to look at them, but I wouldn't want to own one.

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fact--the fact that explains so much male posturing and efforts to confine woman. Because they are superior in relation-creating and community-building, Women should figure out how to make men feel (1) less frightened and (2) more manly. Happy the women who've figured it out, and miserable the women who say "It's as much a man's job as a woman's."

4. "Cape Cod light," anywhere on earth, is bouncelight from sky-sea to sea-sky to sky-earth, and artists love it for its brilliance without glare and its shadowlessness. It exists wherever sea overwhelms (without covering) land. Provincetown has almost no land, so it's crawling with painters. For the religious person, human life is a small island in a vast sea bathed in an endless sky (cf. Freud's "oceanic feeling"). The island comes from the sky and so (passively) reflects and (actively) projects it: we are from deity, in deity's "image and likeness," and we image deity (Freud having accepted only the second half of this statement, in his THE FUTURE OF AN ILLUSION). Then, our imaging of deity bounces back from sky-sea-sky to land, i.e., to us. That's why the study of religion (here, of the deities) is essential to understanding humanity. Now, prehistorically and historically, the deities are "into" synergizing intimacy (the feminine principle) and autonomy (the masculine principle), and it's almost impossible: that's why both sky and land are usually a mess, a tangle of broken hearts and dashed dreams. When the mess becomes unendurable, both heaven and earth settle down to normative sex-role assignments which, when they become rigid, yield to subterranean ("unconscious") pressures that, breaking forth ("consciousness-raising"), disrupt settled living (the pumice of Pompeii, the lavaflows of Hawaii). For woman/man relations, ours is a volcanic time. Here, from my meditations on deities and humans, are some clues toward a higher level (atop the pumice and lava) of man/woman relating: (1) Since "wholeness" is a secular synonym for salvation and all can be saved, "wholeness" must be defined so as to include everyone of whatever "filing status" (to use the IRS term). (2) But since the woman/man relationship is natural, as confirmed both by the biofamily and by the relationship's potential payoffs in human values, singles must be viewed (along with homos) as unwhole--though few singles and homos manage to leap the emotional barrier to accepting the reality of their unwholeness. Hepburn has, though: "I've lived like a man and don't regret it. But I haven't lived like a woman, and I do regret that." (3) The complementation of the fact of the mutual superiority/inferiority of the sexes is the fact that the central good each sex has "to give" can be gotten only as a gift from God through the other sex. Loree had in mind to become an oldmaid missionary, and I had a hellava time persuading her otherwise: I gave her the gift of autonomy, and she is "whole" in both senses. I was a bachelor professor, and I am "whole" in both senses because she gave me the gift of intimacy. God intends marriage to be the mutual gift of freedom and joy for the glory of God and for earth's freedom and joy. (4) No previous generation knew as much as we know about intimacy and about autonomy, and seldom have human beings known so little about spirituality, without which marriage is hell, intimacy is rape (even when mutual rape), and autonomy is tyranny and loneliness. (5) To keep earth from boring him, God reverses the hormones in 5% of the population: a few men are better at intimacy than most women, a few women are better at autonomy than most men. We well play this game with God when we discover and release each person's proclivities. (6) Another of God's games we have to be caring and sharp to play well: As spouses go through life-stages, the varying intimacy/autonomy needs of each zigzag. It takes a lot of talk to discern and honor these shifts. (7) Folks' hopes in marriage are no so high that most couples don't have everything it takes to "make it." Ministry here must include helping them to say "We're just not bright enough, or caring enough, or both, to 'make it' without help." Given our culture's punishing sanctions shaped in the interest of a individualism that misshapes humanity, most needy couples will not so confess--so their marriages will be dismal and (at least in that sense) doomed. (8) The Church's primary opening and responsibility here is training in "How to Be a Human Being," an educational task requiring the best of all we've got--theologically, psychologically, sociologically, anthropologically, historically (including study of the deities).

No thinksheet can exceed 2pp. Therefore see #1828 for fulfilment of this one's promise.