

OVERENCOURAGING THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Good Friday '85, two days ago, on TV, I encouraged the women's movement Biblically: the two women in Ruth 1.16 reveal the heart of God as leal-love. But have I and other male religion-scholars been overdoing this? I'm reminded of the little old one (called, before the women's movement, "little old lady") who said "Don't vote: it only encourages them." As a self-perceived radical, I've tended to be "more radical than thou" whatever the issue or movement: it's one style of self-location in/out of conventional behavior and the establishment. Naturally enough, I desexized hymns to be sung at N.Y.Theological Seminary's commencements. But I've been thinking 2nd-3rd-4th long thoughts about revolutionary feminism, which is going not for balance and equality but for, literally, "revolution," the first (i.e., males) last and the last (i.e., females) first--as in Mary Daly's latest book, PURE LUST....Two irritations prompt this thinksheet:

1. **An event:** In the pattern of book-defense face-to-face with one's peer-scholars, Mary Daly came to the spring meeting of AAR/SBL/CBA/ASOR with her PURE LUST. But she violated the ethos, turning what should have been a book-defense into a feminist liturgy in praise of the numinous Feminine, "holier than thou" masculine (thus, the model for this thinksheet's title). It was announced that there'd be no discussion. High priestess MD, as severely dressed as any butch I've ever seen, mumbled her sacred phrases (including the neoPythagorean "13"), then was praised by three attendant priestesses, all sycophants of her (2, of Harvard Div.School's teaching staff; 1, of Boston Theol.Inst.). The fact that a Jesuit school (Boston College) pays her to do this blaspheming is an example of this thinksheet's subtitle, "overencouraging the women's movement." I spare you, dear reader, the blasphemy's details; but I must say that the Bible, where not rejected outright for hypermasculinity (as MD long ago rejected the Bible's God), is prostituted in the interest of hyperfemininity. (As a nun, MD was 7 years in postgraduate study; as an atheist poet, she's powerful, even brilliant--but, oh, how I'd like to get at her in the hope of getting to her! But right there's the rub: if any of the boys, in the current atmosphere, attacks any of the girls, he's a mere sexist; and if any of the girls attacks any of the girls, she's a mere traitor. These two "meres" are chiefly responsible for feminism's drifting off farther and farther away from reality and sanity. A wry consolation: the old adage, "Give 'em enough rope and they'll hang themselves"--which applies to both the irritations I'm addressing in this thinksheet.)

2. **A book:** THE FEMINIST BIBLE (1989?) will be the end-of-the-line development of a movement or drift we now (1985 pub.date) can see in midpassage in Letty M. Russell (ed.), FEMINIST INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE (Westminster). By 2000, this radical-feminist revisionist Bible will be the curiosum Thos. Jefferson's NT (of which I have a copy) now is. Now, a curiosum is powerless because it's gumming it, having lost its teeth. I look forward to the day when this new butchered Bible will be a curiosum; but right now I'm worried about what I may call the Daly-Doeppler effect. None of the authors in Letty's anthology are as alienated from Scripture as is Mary Daly, who progressively surrendered patriarchy, the patriarchal Book, finally the Patriarch (God). But Mary's present position is, I fear, the logic of the present drift of the influential essayists in Letty's book....(NOTE on the Doeppler effect, which was influential on Einstein in his development of the relativity theory: the tone of an approaching train-whistle is higher than normal (that, in my analogy, was the situation in early feminism, by which I mean pre-Daly), and the tone of a receding train-whistle is lower than normal till it fades entirely away (that I see as having happened to Letty and her essayists: they are moving farther and farther away from Scripture and have already arrived at the point where an entire rewrite of the Bible is, in medical parlance, "indicated"))....My thinksheets again^{the} Inclusive Language Lction-

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ary brushed aside its pushers' protestation that users would not cease using the Bible itself: said I, almost no Roman Catholic sacristy has a Bible, the Missal sufficing. Letty's stable of scholars are, I fear, the core of the "translators" who'll produce the logical next stage, viz., THE FEMINIST BIBLE--not a canon within the canon but a new canon itself for a new religion...Why a new religion? Because the Bible is more than sexist, it is masculinist. In making a salad, I began to cut out the rot in an old apple "to get down to the good part"; but it turned out there wasn't any good part: the apple was "rotten to the core." Mary Daly must be credited with being first to the courage of confessing this awful truth which, as so-called "feminist interpretation" goes deeper and deeper, is less and less capable of concealment. Its a limitation, flaw, wart that cosmetology can't conquer; it's part of our religion's "scandal of particularity" (a scandal all religions of history have: bloodless, groundless mock-ups of a perfect religion never amount to more than philosophy, which in itself is a noble, critique-giving endeavor). Radical feminism's effort to produce a "pure" (i.e., sexism-free) Bible won't actually produce a new religion (any more than the Victorian effort to produce a dirty-language-free Shakespeare produced a new Shakespeare) but only a new curiosum--which fact makes me feel sad about the waste of brain and heart and about the needless alienation this doomed cause is causing...Philosophical theology can and should talk about "the God beyond God": Biblical theology (which Letty's writers claim to be "doing") cannot honestly, authentically, do so--and this is the book's basic lack of integrity and hypocrisy. (On the latter: Attacking "patriarchy" for lack of human authenticity and integrity, this book comes up with its own way of lacking both.)...As the Enlightenment thoroughly explored religion "within the limits of reason," with Letty's book the women's movement has unwittingly exposed Christianity "within the limits of feminism": Kant's "religion" didn't really turn out to be religion, and feminism's "Christianity" can't really turn out to be Christianity. There's the tragedy; and the sooner it's exposed, the better. (But we boys can't expose it to the girls! That'd be just one more instance of "patriarchal oppression"! And no girl in sight has both the ability and the courage to expose it to the girls. That's the bind.) ...The choice Christian women have is (1) to abandon ship, give up the Christian religion (as did Mary Daly) or (2) go along with our religion's masculinism (testosterone leading the estrogens, in God and "man") whether or not fighting sexism (which is, as my antonym here of masculinism, the boys taking unfair advantage of the girls in any/every sphere of life). Because scholarship and honesty have forced me to concede masculinism (as I'm, for the first time, calling it here in this thinksheet), I'm all the more determined to fight sexism, which is an insult to the feminine in God/girls/boys and therefore to the Creator, in whose eyes is no proso'polempsia (favoritism of males over females, giving higher worth to the former over the latter)...As for comparative religion, ours is the most antisexist of the historical religions. Our very power and freedom to dream of an androgynous culture is Biblically informed, Biblically motivated. Rejoice in this! By the Christian impulse in history, we may have been brought right up to the limits of equality/equity in thinking (certainly not in living!). I think so, and that's it's now time to explore the mutual superiority of the sexes. And I hold to the libertarian principle that ability, not sex or any other factor, should be THE question in hiring (including ordination) and employee-rewarding (a principle that logically includes "elitism" and the inequalities-price society must pay for excellence)...The year Letty and I co-taught a doctoral seminar on Life/Ministry Integration (1976), she wrote THE LIBERATING WORD: A GUIDE TO NONSEXIST INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE. Now (this 1985 book) she's cut deeper into the rotten apple: her intro, "Liberating the Word," means that the Bible itself must be saved from "patriarchal bias"! This Doepler shift is the book's *raison d'etre*--I'd subtitle it FROM HERMENEUTICS TO REVISIONISM (compare a fundamentalist Bible such as Darbyism's Scofield; compare also what's appearing more and more as the Marxist Bible, a poverty/oppression canon within the canon). Just what are the limits of authentic, honest, legitimate interpretation of the Bible--beyond which you're intellectually into revisionism and spiritually into kabbalism?

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QUESTION: Is these writer's logic an androgynous God, or the Goddess? Cf. writer Grace Paley (91NW15Apr85): "War is God-given, form is Goddess-given." Mary Daley is clearly a devotee of the Goddess Rediviva: are Letty's authors also, surreptitiously though perhaps unknowingly, so--or on the way thereto? I only hope not.

Objectivity about male/female nature-and-roles is only a possible impossibility, yet these authors assume primordial androgyny (as does, e.g., the gnostic Gospel of Thomas) and, as goal, psychosocial equality--the 2nd, an implicate as the 1st--as-myth--an instance of the fictive as foundation for the prescriptive. A 2nd myth is divine androgyny, viz., that feminine and masculine are coeval and coauthoritative in God--with, as implicate, that human males and females are potentially equal in leadership. And a 3rd myth is that historically, in the production of the present situation of females/males, the term "oppression" of the former by the latter not only accurately, but best, describes the etiology: the boys have been greater sinners against the girls than vice versa... Within the past 12 hours I've seen two parallel instances of this accusative impenitence: (1) Roman priests defending Mother Church against liberation-theology's accusation that Mother Church has historically committed adultery with "the principalities and powers" oppressing the poor; and (2) members of the (Orleans, MA) Community of Jesus defending their community against ex-members' accusations of highhandedness, brainwashing, and both verbal and physical abuse. For all God's chillun, blaming is so much easier than repenting! Naturally, then, you'll not find in Letty's book an essay on "How and Why the Girls Have Been Bad News to the Boys": feminism's mythic constellation accounts for female cussedness as, without remainder, only reactive to male cussedness... That's an instance of a general reductiveness in the overall mythology: God's reduced to who/what's good for humanity (esp. women), Sin's reduced to what's bad for humanity (esp. women). Salvation's reduced to liberation (in the illogical reversible proposition "Since S=L, L=S without remainder"--an error I've seen often in L.Am. "base community" literature, esp. of Christian Sandinistas). Liberation's reduced to improved ecosocial conditions (esp. for women). Human (esp. female) dignity's reduced to dependency on those improved ecosocial conditions (even though dignity in the Bible has two radically other orientations, viz., God's glory and human endurance of untowardnesses)... In my head, the picture of all this feminist transformation (better, transmogrification) of our spiritual heritage is 1789's two women in a French church: one, Mother Mary, is the church's namesake (Notre Dame Cathedral); the other, the Goddess of Victory-Freedom, displacing the crucifix in the apse (actually placed on the altar, as was, 197 BC, a pig in the Jerusalem temple--the goddess that was to reappear in N.Y. Harbor and has just undergone a radical facelifting: is feminism, with its antibiblical Enlightenment euphoria, also a facelifting on the ancient Goddess?). Men, though sometimes confessed as potential partners, are generally reduced to oppressors. Equality is reduced to arithmetic. Mutuality is reduced to the contractual mentality: no awe of each sex in the other's presence, but instead an increase of distance, leading to xenophobia-xenomisia (fear of the stranger verging into hate, viz., misandry and misogyny)--Sen. Moynahan, in his current report, has it that by the year 2000, 2/3rds of Am. "families" will be single-parent, almost entirely mother + chn.--there no longer being enough interest, as in the case of lions, for the impregnating male to remain with female and cubs. Feminists reply that if they succeed, the mother-father-chn. family will experience revival. But (as Freud asked "What do women want?") a prior question is unaddressed by Letty's book (or any other feminist literature I've read): What do men want? what satisfactions are *sine qua non* to a male's hanging in there with only one female till death do them part (the male inclination to rove being stronger than the female inclination to rove)? Of course all human-relations propositions are Protean, taking the shape convenient to the speaker at the moment; but some brute facts need facing. E.g., what if anything is to be done about the rising percentage of bastardy in Am. (more than 1/2 Blacks born since 1979, already, being bastards, the condition projected as general by 2000)? Is the "equality-mutuality" formula a cure for all this chaos and misery--the solution, or only a root of the problem?... Marriage continues popular (as, said GBS, providing "the maximum of opportunity with the minimum of effort"), but fatherhood is in steep decline (despite glowing slick-mag articles on "the new father"). How shape up boys to become men (instead of the "only old boys," of which real women rightly complain), then how shape up men to be fathers?... Is there any es-

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SOCIOLOGY-OF-KNOWLEDGE NOTES: (1) All the authors are females, and (2), with the exception of the Jew(ess), all are eating off of schools. (As myself an old schoolman, I have a keen sense of the strengths, perversions, and limitations of this 2nd-noted fact.)

sential truth to "He's gotta be boss or he won't play?" Is testosterone the initiative hormone, as a woman prof. in Harv.Med.School claims (so clever women help boys and men to take the lead)? That better fits my biology, which is too bad for my theology, which would prefer initiative androgyny (the lead taken on the basis of the person's genes in general rather than the hormonal component thereof). When, in feminist meetings, I've quoted said prof. on said subject, I've gotten nothing but abuse driven by rage (the rage of the women running the meeting, and of other men in the audience). How do we get beyond this primitive reaction down to dealing with the full range of pertinent data? (Yes, the rage here is from a violation of the sacred, the sacred in the current feminism being the Enlightenment autonomous person viewed as fundamentally asexual. Ironically, we have here a new version of "Sex is dirty"! In my recent encounter with Mary Daly, she was explicit on this: for her, heterosexual genitility is an obscenity--a revised version of the attitude engendered in her when she was a nun. A parallel to sex-is-obscene radical feminism is "The Anti-Sex League" in Geo.Orwell's "1984"--a prescient and wry view of our present politics of sex.)...I wish our authors in Letty's book called themselves "feminist Christians" instead of "Christian feminists." If they did, I'd be more hopeful of their trying to lead other feminists into a fresh understanding of sexuality in all its ramifications, beginning with its divine origin (which dictates sex as liturgical, the devotional-experiential honoring of the Source--including mutual subhonoring of the sexes for what each sex uniquely is--which, however, would lead us toward what is so offensive to the Enlightenment mentality, viz., sexual role-assignments--which, however, need not be, as they were in the past, oppressive of the individual)...It's hard for dreamers (of which feminists are one class) to handle irreducibles such as (1) sin (including the perversity of both female and male), (2) the radical differential of complexity in parent-child relating (the father's relating being relatively peripheral: no gestating, parturition, lactating-nursing--the mother/child relation being far more corporeal and, paradoxically, far more simple though biologically far more complex--leaving the father's parenting role to be socially defined and consequently psychosocially far more fragile, in need of social and numinous and rational support), (3) the fact that societies modulate but do not essentially change "till Kingdom come," and (4) the fact that death, relativizing our relationships and trivializing many of our fought-for "values," directs us to cosmic-divine contexting and revalorizing of our perceptions and convictions. ...With the exception of breakthrough flashes, the Biblical God has a bias for the poor and for males: are we to credit the former and not the latter? If so, can we do so with more exegesis than eisogesis? Does liberation theology have more to do with the Statue of Liberty than with Mother Mary?...And one more irreducible (Kath.D.Sakenfeld,63): "The Bible is thoroughly androcentric, recorded and canonized by men." To wipe out that stain (if that's what it is), you'd have to write an essentially (?) new book--no? Yes, I think. Our old Bible is a permanent witness to what? male creativity? male oppression of females? male multiple-superiority? any, or any combination of, the above? I can't imagine any of these questions ever going away, so (though I'm a feminist) I can't be a radical feminist. In eristic perspective, the girls will always be, more than the boys, on the defensive vis-a-vis these questions--no matter how much any of them rages against this reality. But context it in my doctrine of the mutual inferiority/superiority of the sexes, and it's not so bad: it's a female inferiority, but of minor significance unless blimped up for the purpose of rhetorical denial....Until the women's movement hit, it hadn't occurred to me that women might be in any ontological sense inferior (though their historical and societal inferiorities, which could be attributed to male "oppression," had been clear to me since I was a child) (any more than I'd thought about any ontological inferiority of the male). I now see a double grid: male/female on the x-axis, with two sets on the y-axis: superior/inferior, and victimizer/victim. This double grid I'm using for God/nature/nurture/history/hope contexting. Letty's book (which I've studied thoroughly) is useful rhetoric, but there's nothing in it providing a dialog model such as my double grid. If all parties could evolve an acceptable model, we might make progress not just on "feminist interpretation of the Bible" but, broadly, on female/male relationships.

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For easy reference, I'm numbering the remaining comments:

1. Anybody who comes up with another Jesus (i.e., one radically different from the Figure in the Gospels) has "another gospel" (Gal.1.8). I'm entirely sympathetic toward feminist exegetes-theologians of Christian background who want to avoid doing the Mary Daly, i.e., abandoning both Church and Faith; but I fear their project is of doubtful outcome and devious course. E.g., chap.5 has Jesus the sexist desexized by confrontation with a liberated woman (Mt.15.20-28, M.7.24-30): so is Sharon Ringe's religion really not "the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" but the gospel of the liberated woman? P.60: "The Gentile woman...is said to have called his bluff. In so doing, she seems to have enabled him to act in a way apparently blocked to him before." I'm put in mind of the Isis priestess (in a D.H.Lawrence novel) who taught Jesus a thing or two by giving him a lay and bearing his child--a beautiful piece of fiction. Which is the problem: is "feminist interpretation of the Bible" beautiful fiction? I fear so, and that the beauty will be underappreciated as the project appears more and more to be fiction or at least fictive--as H.J.Cadbury (1937) attacks, in his THE PERIL OF MODERNIZING JESUS, such a well-meaning but bizarre revisioning of Jesus as Bruce Barton's THE MAN NOBODY KNOWS (1925; Jesus as Mad.Av. exec). Or the Jesuses of the gnostic gospels.

2. Take, e.g., the Lord's Prayer, which is patriarchal to the core. To use Letty's distinction (chap.11), how are you going to do a rewrite on LP's "authority of domination" that makes it look like the "authority of partnership"? Jesus believed (as I do) that the divine Patriarch (*Abba*-Father, our Father in heaven) is Dominus ("Lord," thus "domination"), and that we're in a grace period (like the 30 days extra you have to pay a bill) that's running out--at the end of which humanity will cease to have the option of doing/not doing the Patriarch's Will: that Will will be done "on earth as it is in heaven." How is that Will done in heaven? Unquestionably, Jesus believed that in heaven that Will is absolute, the Patriarch having the power of life/death, inclusion/exclusion (as Jesus' "I beheld Satan cast out of heaven"). So it isn't just that Jesus, outstandingly among his contemporaries, had "Father" as his favorite address-term for God, and we can depatriarchalize him by substituting some other title when we pray the LP (as some pastors are trying to teach their congregations to do!). To use the figure I've used above, (from the standpoint of radical feminism) the apple is rotten to the core: Jesus is radically patriarchal. And it isn't as though it were possible to clean up Jesus' "Father" act by investing "Father" with our current white upper-and-middle class notions (e.g., Letty's "authority of partnership"): the LP itself invests "Father" with royal dominion (Hebrew *malkuth*, Greek *basileia*--both abstract nouns from the concrete noun "king"; ditto for Aramaic). Conceivably, Jesus could have elevated the Decalog's parent-honoring to "Our Father-Mother, hallowed be your Name" (as I've often begun public prayer with "Our Father-Mother God,...")--but he did not. (See G.F.Moore's classic treatment of Judaism's central sanction, "the sanctification of the Name.") With severe compaction, the LP has Jesus instructing his disciples to trust the Father-King for bodily sustenance, the restoration of broken relationships, guidance, and protection: total submission to, dependence upon, the Patriarch. Even if it's said, as it should be, that Jesus' control sociomodel is the family ("Father,...") rather than the state (the more common contemporary Jewish "King of the world/eternity," *'olam*), we are not entitled to read our notion of the ideal family into his use of the model. And the difference between his Father-King and King-Father is not great in first-century Judaism; hardly as great as our intimate/ultimate, warm/cool.

3. Radical feminism implies a new Lord's Prayer, a new not-"Lord" Jesus, a new god--much as Marcion (mid-2nd-century) saw Christianity as presenting a new god (THE God, in contrast to Judaism's old and false but powerful god).* Marcion's reason? He was deeply offended by the OT's wrathful Patriarch, and had the courage (not the wisdom!) to have no truck with Him (in my parlance, he "did the Mary Daly"). (In 1941-2, I had the privilege of working with Jn. Knox toward the 1942 U. of Chicago publication of his MARCION AND THE NT, and I have a feel for Marcion's heart as well as his mind. He certainly wasn't all bad, nor are our radical feminists; but they're doomed to be-

*Cf. the Nazi "German Christians" rejection of the OT and its God.

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come what he has become, viz., an historical curiosity, one more entry in the history of ditheism (perhaps tritheism? or, more logically, atheism?).)

4. As Feuerback, Marx, Freud--following Voltaire--viewed deity-ideas as earth-reflections on the bottom of clouds (what Shirley Jackson Case cleverly called "transcendentalized politics"), so the radical feminists: the old patriarchal God is "nothing but" ancient Near Eastern power-arrangements (in family, economics, statecraft) projected up onto the divinity. Why is the situation thus simplistically defined, using the "nothing but" fallacy? Because only thus can the definition implicitly contain the solution: if the patriarchal element in the tradition's viewing of God is "nothing but" human projection, God can be cleaned up by eliding the projection. But what if (as C.S. Lewis never tired of asking) we humans are, in our beings and arrangements, projections of God (the notion explicit in *imago dei*, Gn.1.27, Vulgate repeating "imaginem")? Not just the weight of history but also the weight of logic then argues a divine origin for patriarchy--taking feminist argumentation right back to square one. Mind you: I'm against both simple-minded projectionism (earth to heaven) and simpleminded divine-rightism (heaven to earth) --and I'm for a nuanced ambiguity that provides not only room but also materials for maximizing human values. What militates against this ethos is the lust for clarity; and (a philosophy-of-history note) clarity leads straight into hybris. Lord, help me to clarify what should be clarified; and help me to keep muddy what should be kept muddy; and grant me the courage and wisdom for both projects... So what account is to be given of the etiology of patriarchy? Nothing in Letty's book on this. Perhaps the fact that the boys had bigger muscles than the girls? But why that biological fact, in contrast to the fact that tigresses have bigger muscles than tigers? (Cf. the current argument, in paleobiology, as to whether we came from soup or mud, mud beginning --with Genesis!--to win its way over soup, the 1930 notion of a USSR scientist, generally taught in Am. public schools as fact.) In sense-making, it's special pleading to set aside uncomfortable questions, to "bracket out" facts indigestible to one's theory (I've only be growled and laughed at when, in feminist meetings, I've mentioned the curious muscle-reversal as between humans and tigers; they "couldn't handle" it).

5. The book deals with women's "full humanity" only vis-a-vis patriarchy, which it defines (circularly) as whatever denies, distorts, demeans, diminishes women's "full humanity." Since this is also the traditional definition of the devil-Satan in his/her(?) relationship with (hu)mankind, the book's guilty of captivity to a mindless-prideful demon-theory: it's definition of "patriarchy" is not psychologically, sociologically, historically, or theologically useful. Of course it's rhetorically useful: Letty's book is a tract, a diatribe (not a dialog, nor even an invitation thereto, though it claims to be the latter). To illustrate this narrowness, I'll allude to the irony that in our 1985 Am. culture, while thousands of females are clamboring for "full humanity," millions of females are shrinking the humanity they have (from $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$?) by (1) aping power-males, (2) derogating their natural (as distinguished from their culture-specific) femininity, and (3) being easy lays (a self-cheapening that substitutes "relations" for "relationship" and reduces mutuality to sex "partnership"). If radical feminists blame all this mess on "patriarchy," they are as far from being helpful to women as are Blacks who blame all Black woes on whites far from being helpful to Blacks. The ugly truth is that millions of women, with little are no help from "patriarchy," are corrupting, demeaning, diminishing, distorting themselves, making themselves unworthy of God and (sic) man. Perhaps part of the energy in the women's movement comes from the effort of the feminine archetypal unconscious toward homeostatic correction of all this female messing up. Anyway, you'll find nothing of all this in Letty's book; it's so cerebral you'd hardly know women have hair, skin, and sin. (Two chapters--Cannon & Thistlewaite--have female hair & skin, but not sin.)

6. In case anyone should wonder, I'm 40 years into a blissful partnership marriage: I'm far from a dried-up old misogynist! Millions of men are indifferent, have given up on women: I care, care deeply, care enough to attack what I see as emergings of the false feminine and the foolist, self-defeating feminine. My reward from radical feminists (and some not so radical)? As the sour old saw has it, "A good deed never goes unpunished."