

Jacob and the (female) Angel

Criticism of Female Angel

When the sculpture of “Jacob Wrestling with the Angel” was viewed on Palm Sunday, the angel’s sexuality (female) became a point of discussion. Theologically, I have no depth of understanding on this point.

As an artist, I have been advised on many occasions to trust what comes out of the creative experience. Many times the artist doesn’t know why he/she does what he/she does. But the discussion made me sensitive to what might be said with this piece.

The Masseuse’ View

After the critique of the angel being portrayed as a woman instead of a man, a friend telephoned to say that she had dreamed about the conflict. And she was reminded that from her massage training, where she has encountered contemporary positions on spirituality, she was told that spirituality is the female side of humanity. So in this view, males seeking the spiritual side of themselves must embrace their female side. This view would make sense of my Jacob and the Angel sculpture to the contemporary world.

It is never my intent to “make” art to make a “proof text” for any ideology. But it came out of the creative process that way, so I trust that it needed to be said.

Developmental Psychological View

Father Carlos’ comment was that the angel could very well have been female. For Jacob to gain his identity as a male, he had to struggle to separate from his powerful, manipulative mother, Rebecca. It was she who arranged for Jacob to deceive Isaac and thus receive the blessing that Esau should have had.

Further research points to the idea that Jacob’s identity was an even deeper issue than individuation from Mom.

The Meaning of a Name

Paul Tournier writes in The Meaning of Names: “In the Old Testament, the name is the essence of a personality. A name is regarded as possessing an inherent power which exercises a constraint upon its bearer. The bearer must conform to his essential nature as expressed in his name. Personal existence is even perpetuated posthumously in the name which is bestowed by a man’s descendants. To cut off a name, therefore, is to end the existence of its bearer.”

So we have the change of name which accompanies a change in character ie. Jacob to Israel. Thus to change Jacob’s name is the end the existence of the bearer of the characteristics that name carried. Jacob means “supplanter” (one who steps into the shoes of another, unseats, crowds out, dethrones, ejects, ousts, deposes of, drives out. . .). And we know that he was a supplanter: selling Esau a bowl of soup in exchange for his birthright, deceiving Isaac for the blessing of the older son. . .

“Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.” Gen. 32: 28.

With the new name, Israel, came a new characteristic. “Israel is translated *he who striveth with God, or God striveth, or he who persevereth, and also “prince”*.”

Jacob’s character changes with the new name.

“ In the titanic struggle, Jacob came to realize his own weakness and the superiority of the mighty One who had touched him. At the moment of yielding, he became a new man, who could receive the blessings of God and assume his place in God’s plan. The new name, Israel, suggests royalty and power and sovereignty among men. He was destined to be a God-governed man instead of an unscrupulous supplanter. He had come through defeat into power. All the rest of his life he would be crippled; yet his limp would be a reminder of his new royalty.” (Wycliffe Bible Commentary)

“Name change to Israel is actually the great moment of change for Jacob’s whole life. All the deception and guile, all the lies and blasphemous pretense seem to go out of his life with this event. He becomes a mellow man, touched not only in the thigh by the angel of the Lord, but in the heart by the Lord Himself.” (Great Personalities of the Bible, William Sanford LaSor.)

Male vs female form critique.

Four versions of scripture use “man”. Perhaps the generic term for humanity is implied here(?) In scripture we don’t always see distinction between the sexes. But in reading these scriptures literally, one would see the angel as male.

Still, I must be true to the voice inside that urged me to give her the female qualities which I pictured as I formed her.

Ultimately God is infinite, above and over all.

In order to have infinite power, our God Creator has to be above all sexual contexts. He’s in all and over all. Omnipotent.

C. S. Lewis’ View of the sexes in eternity:

“What is no longer needed for biological purposes may be expected to serve for splendor. Sexuality is the instrument both of virginity and conjugal virtue. . .”

Inspirational Writings of C.S. Lewis
April 27 “Heaven and Sexuality” p. 361

In my sculpture “Jacob Wrestling with the Angel,”

The angel remains female!