

EFFEMINACY AS VILIFICATION IN THE LETTER OF JUDE: FEMALE SEXUALITY AND THE CONSTITUTION OF HIERARCHY AND AUTHORITY

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to discuss effeminacy as a vilification technique in the Letter of Jude. It aims to question the power relations embedded in an institutionalised patriarchal mind-set central to sexual ethics and the female body in the Letter of Jude. This power display is demonstrated by the author's presentation, to the reader, of himself as the embodiment of the authoritative traditions, and the way his opponents are feminised, in terms of female depravity, as a kind of cliché used in religious discourse (cf. Jer 3:1-10). This research explores a privileged heteropatriarchy and its binary understandings of gender and sexual ethics. It seems that binary opposites enforced and sanctioned sexual ethics in the Jude community, although gender-specific issues are absent from the Letter. Questioning the inevitability of heteropatriarchy, and its normative status for constructing 'authority' and 'truth' in Jude, will be a logic outcome of the study.

Key Words: Vilification; Effeminacy; Letter of Jude; Female Depravity; Sexuality; Hierarchy; Authority; Heteropatriarchy

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how the author uses sexual depravity as vilification to effeminate his opponents in order to maintain his authority among the Christians in the community. Moreover, the Letter is read from a gender-critical approach in this discussion. Therefore, it is read with the intention of revealing gender concerns underlying the rhetoric of the author. His gender views might have been part of his ideological world-view; however, taking into account that the Letter is included in the authoritative canon of the Christian faith, it consciously and unconsciously influences the gender approach of contemporary readers as well. Women in the contemporary world should not tolerate the way an authoritative document approves the vilification of the female body and female sexuality. Recently, as so often before, I witnessed a road rage incident between men of different racial backgrounds and economic status, insulting each other verbally by using offensive female names and female bodily and genital language. The reality is that these people could take each other to court for public insult, but reading the Letter of Jude during a Church service might not even lift an eyebrow.

Vilification as Rhetorical Technique

Vilifying opponents and praising followers, or a combination of the two, are very old rhetorical techniques used by ancient and contemporary authors and speakers as useful persuasive tools to influence their audiences and to increase honour and elude shame. During Hellenistic times, it was commonly used throughout the Mediterranean world by philosophers, public speakers, politicians, as well as Jewish and Christian authors to ridicule their opponents and influence their audience to dissociate themselves from the opponent's view, endorsing the author's viewpoint instead (cf. Du Toit 1994:404; Forbes 1986:3-15).

In honour-shame societies, the game of challenge-riposte is a central phenomenon played out in public. This game comprises a challenge (almost any word, gesture or action) that seeks to undermine the honour of any person coupled by a response that either answers in equal measure or 'ups the ante', and therefore challenges in return. Both positive (gifts and compliments) and negative (insults and dares) challenges must be responded to in order to avoid serious 'loss of face' (Malina & Rohrbauch 1992:42). In these societies, honour meant everything, because it was the public acknowledgment of one's worth or social value (1992:76). Honour can be understood more fully as the status one claims in the community together with the all-important recognition of that claim by others. It thus serves as an indicator of social standing, enabling persons to interact with their social superiors, equals, and inferiors in certain ways prescribed by that society.

The sexual honour of women is especially important in acclaiming public and family honour. Malina and Rohrbauch say that "While male honour is flexible and can sometimes be regained, female honour is absolute and once lost is gone forever. It is the emotional-conceptual counterpart of virginity. Any sexual offense on a woman's part, however slight, would destroy not only her own honour but that of all males in her paternal kin group as well" (1992:77). Therefore using vilification, especially in the form of effeminacy to ridicule opponents was a handy tool to increase honour and elude shame in ancient society.

Moreover, stereotyping people demarcated the parameters of purity in the community and broader society. All human societies have systems of meaning in order to make sense of life. These systems support the society to determine who or what is out of place and to consider what is wrong, deviant and senseless. One such overall system of meaning is the purity system, 'pure' (clean and 'in place') or 'impure' (unclean or 'out of place'). This system can be applied to persons, groups, things, times and places. As Malina and Rohrbauch (1992:72) describe it: "Such purity distinctions embody the core values of a society and thereby provide clarity of meaning, direction of activity, and consistency for social behaviour. What accords with these values and their structural expression in a purity system is considered 'pure', and what does not is viewed as 'polluted'."

Therefore, the general objective of vilification was to differentiate insiders from outsiders by stereotyping or labelling outsiders (Malina & Neyrey 1988:35-42). The aim of negative labelling was to shame opponents and, within a first century social context of honour and shame values, also defined the parameters of purity (cf. Neyrey 1986:91-128). Someone who had honour was considered pure, while someone who had been shamed was considered impure, and regarded as 'dirt' (Malina & Rohrbauch 1992:72).

A good example of a speaker who vilifies his opponents to gain the support of the crowd can be found in Matthew 23. Here, the speaker, Jesus, slanders his adversaries (the scribes and the Pharisees) to gain the favour of the masses and his disciples.

Paul and other New Testament writers were also well-skilled in this technique (cf. Gal 1-2; 2 Cor 10-11; 2 Tim 2-3; 2 Peter 2; cf. Boonzaaier 2003:1280; Van der Watt & Kok 2008a:1798). A very important aspect of the vilification in Jude and 2 Peter 2 is that the opponents are neither identified nor named. The reader knows only that they are accused of immorality and that they deny Jesus Christ (Jud 4). We also do not have the opponents' response to the accusations, although they have already apparently challenged the authority of Jude and this is his riposte to their challenge. Here he is actually addressing the Christian community as a whole, and not directly challenging the opponents.

The vilification process covers such a broad field and encompasses so many different facets, but, for the purpose of this article, vilification, as the specific use of negating the moral integrity of opponents, in the Letter of Jude,¹ is explored.

Currently, scholars tend to support the dependence of 2 Peter 2 on Jude (cf. Callan 2004:42 ft1), but in recent research the vilification of the opponents in Jude has been compared with 2 Peter 2, and the conclusion was that the authors used a common source rather than each other directly, as Chatelion-Counet (2006:407) suggested (cf. Nortjé-Meyer 2011). While both criticise false teachers who had infiltrated their respective communities, 2 Peter criticises both the content of their teachings, as well as their immoral behaviour resulting from the teachings. Jude, on the other hand, mainly criticises the immoral behaviour of his rivals. The use of Jewish traditions and traditional material to support his argumentation against these opponents, as well as his extensive critique of their immorality, indicates that the description of these adversaries is a construct of the author and that they are probably 'encoded opponents', rather than 'real-life opponents' (cf. Du Toit 1994:404). Especially in Jude, where the immorality of adversaries is highlighted, descriptions are dominated by strong subjectivity and the perceptions of the author and his personal interpretation of their actions within the framework of his conflict with them (cf. Du Toit 1994:411). In his conclusion, Brosend is also of the opinion that the opponents "are likely Christian leaders and teachers, perhaps itinerant, who are guilty of nothing more than what we encounter in Corinthians or the Didache" (2006:304).

Sexual Vilification in Jude

Jude's self-designation as 'the servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James' (v.1) indicates that he claims a certain honour by virtue of having blood relations with James. Who Jude and James were is uncertain, but if this James was the brother of Jesus and the head of the Jerusalem church, Jude could surely claim honour (cf. Turner, Deibler & Turner 1996:2-7; Brosend 2006:294). It seems that the majority of scholars accept this Jude or Judas to be the brother of Jesus, but they are divided on whether he wrote the Letter himself or whether a later person, or even a group who stood in the tradition of Jude, wrote it under his name (cf. Bauckham 1983:21). If the author writes against antinomian Gnosticism as Turner, Deibler and Turner (1996:7) suggest, then the Letter was written during the second century, confirming that it was another writer, and not Jude, the brother of Jesus and James.

However, it seems that certain people in the community challenged his honour and authority and therefore the Letter should be read as a riposte to this (Neyrey 1993:52). It is clear that, in his defence of his honour, he relates this challenge to the trail of Christ putting himself in the same tradition, because these ungodly men also denied Jesus Christ 'our only Master and Lord'. The title 'master' or *despotes* denotes absolute ownership and un-

¹ Cf. Du Toit's discussion of "Vilification in the Early Epistolography" *Biblica* 75(1) 1994:403-412.

controlled power, while 'lord' or *kurios* has the meaning of possessing property and absolutism. The title is therefore a title of honour indicating distinction, rulership and authority, which are therefore characteristics Jude identifies himself as having (Hiebert 1985:150). He also uses the authoritative faith tradition entrusted to the apostles, as well as the authoritative written traditions, to indicate that the prophetic condemnation and punishment of these ungodly men was predicted and was coming into fulfilment at that time (v.4b). His frequent use of 'us' (vv.3,4,17,21,25) indicates his solidarity with God, Jesus, the holy ones, the oral and written traditions, as well as the faithful members of the community to whom he is writing .

The content of the Letter is highly emotional as the author conveys his initial intention, which was to write about the salvation he shared with the readers. But something must have happened to influence him so drastically to write this Letter. Moreover, Reese (200:19-41) indicates in detail the confusing references to the stories from canonical and non-canonical literature. For example, early manuscripts refer to Jesus delivering his people out of Egypt (v.5) which is, of course, biblically incorrect. The question is whether Jude made the mistakes by citing from memory or whether they could be attributed to his emotional distress.

Nevertheless, his accusations of these ungodly men seem furious and endless. As Brosend (2006:301) says; "Twenty-five charges in twenty-five verses is a high rate of accusation". But Jude took out the most useful and destructive weapon from his vilification arsenal to defend his honour and the tradition and to dishonour his opponents.² He accuses them of licentiousness (v.4), committing fornication and pursuing unnatural lusts (v.7), defiling the flesh (v.8), indulging their own lusts (v.16) and ungodly lusts (v.18), following their natural instincts (v.19), and wearing clothing stained by corrupted flesh (v.23). These are just the explicit vilifications (cf. Du Toit 1994:404).

His rhetoric on slaughter also involves implicit vilification³ by using six examples from canonical and non-canonical literature as indications of the opponents' sin and the condemnation they are to face as a result (cf. Brosend 2006:298). Not all the examples have the same degree of sexual connotation, but Wolthuis indicates that the Jewish tradition would interpret most of the examples in a carnal context. For example, the fall and punishment of the angels, referred to in verse 6, indicates that the angels left their proper place to have intercourse with women and were punished for their sin, while the 'way of Cain' in verse 11 refers to an evil life that is selfish, sensual and hateful. The descendants of Cain "were in the habit of walking abroad naked" and "gave themselves up to every conceivable manner of lewd practices" (Wolthuis 1987:32). Moreover, Jude's reference to Balaam's error (v.11) refers to his counselling of Balak to entice the Israelites to practice lewdness. His outrage is evident in verses 14-16 where he refers to the 'ungodly' and 'their deeds of ungodliness' 'committed in an ungodly way' by 'ungodly sinners' (Wolthuis 1987:36-37). But it is the reference to Sodom and Gomorrah that contains the strongest and most condemning examples of licentiousness in the Bible (Gen 19; Jer 23:14 Ezek 16:46-56).

Genesis 19 records very dramatic events. It is traditionally listed among those Old Testament references condemning homosexuals and homosexual activities. It is from here the word 'sodomy' was derived. This article will not engage in the discussion of whether

² Whether vv. 22 and 23 is a lifebuoy thrown out to the opponents, is not clear. Probably it is pastoral concern for the faithful.

³ Implicit vilification is not always obvious, as Boonzaaier (2003:1281) indicates.

the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was homosexuality or the failure to provide protection and hospitality (cf. Bosend 2006:297), or that it is referring to flesh of a different kind namely angelic flesh (cf. Reese 2000:28-29; fnt 70), because the sin Jude had in mind was not a lack of hospitality but sexual depravity. It seems that Jude had homosexual activities in mind when he referred to the sin of 'pursuing unnatural lust' (Jud 7; cf. Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:26-27).

Apart from the story about the men of the city who insisted on having sexual intercourse with the visitors, Genesis 19 also recorded another horrific story in which women were also involved, namely the story of Lot and his two daughters. Firstly, Lot was prepared to sacrifice the virginity of his daughters in order to protect the guests (Gen 19:8) who were strangers. The same story is relayed in Judges 19:23-26, indicating that women are sex objects and can easily be exchanged or replace 'decent' men for rape purposes. Lot's daughters were later the initiators of an immense evil when they decided to have sexual intercourse with their father. The offspring of children who were born from this adulterous and incestuous act became the Amorites and Moabites, the tribes who were the enemies of Israel (Gen 19:36-38). It is this evil to which Ezekiel 16 refers as the daughter of Sodom whose mother is a Hittite and father an Amorite (Ezek 16:45-48). Female sexual depravity is used in this story to portray the evil of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, Israel themselves and later the enemies of Israel (cf. Nortjé-Meyer 2008:231).

In addition, Jude uses five metaphors drawn from nature to illustrate the wicked character of his opponents. The metaphors of the 'waterless clouds' and the 'trees without fruit' are female connotations (Jud 12) of barrenness. Fruit-bearing trees are traditionally a symbol for the beloved woman (as seen in Song 4:13; 7:8-9; Ps 128:3). Water is the ultimate life-giver, and, without water, there is no life on earth. The same applies to fruit trees without fruits. Both metaphors indicate 'barrenness' and complete 'uselessness'. The possibility of rain watering the trees to bear fruit has been eliminated by the wind, which has blown away the clouds, and the fruit trees have been uprooted. In ancient society, a barren woman was regarded as a useless woman. By extension, a wife who could not bear a son to her husband, was considered useless and could be rejected or even divorced (cf. Malina 2001:47).⁴

Since the author refers to Jewish literature to give substance to his arguments, the background of these immorality accusations can be found in the Old Testament rhetoric describing Israel's faithfulness to God in sexual terminology (for example, the complete Book Hosea and Ezek 16, as well as Jud 19 and Gen 19). The prophets used the image of marriage and a wife's (un)faithfulness to her husband to portray syncretism, political alliance with foreign kings or the disregard of prophetic words, all of which were completely unacceptable in Israel. However, men could never be unfaithful to their wives, because they had sexual freedom. Therefore, moral depravity was strongly connected to a woman's sexual behaviour and to the female body.

The author describes those with evil desires as those who: reject the authority of the leaders and insult heavenly beings (v.8); reject the eschatological condemnation of sinners (v.14); slander those who are loyal to the leaders (v.18); and claim that heavenly beings and gentile Christians will not be judged by God (vv.8-9). According to the author, those who indulge their own lusts have the characteristics of all people who are guilty of these views. Accusations of immorality, such as sexual depravity and adultery, were clichés used for

⁴ Cf. Ps 127:3-4, states that "sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one's youth." NRSV.

members of the Church who disrupted the peace, as well as syncretists and apostates (cf. Rosenblatt 1994:396). This rhetorical technique is also well-known in prophetic literature (for example, Jer 3:1-10 and Ezek 16).

Moreover, to be 'without blemish' (Jud 24) is a sexual image of purity. In patriarchal context it refers to the father's mastery of his daughter and his guarantee that she will be a virgin at her wedding. If not, she should be stoned at her father's doorstep by the men of the city (cf. Deut 22:13-21). In the New Testament, the image of an unblemished bride or woman indicates the immaculate morality of the Christian community (cf. Eph 5:27; Rev 21:2). Even the Church's faithfulness to Christ (or in the Old Testament, Israel) is portrayed as a virgin in Jeremiah 18:13; and 31:4, 21; and the virgin daughter of Zion in Isaiah 37:22. According to Jude, the loyal members of the community are analogous to unblemished brides (Jud 24) representing the ascetic ideal, while the behaviour of the opponents is likened to that of immoral women. This illuminates the patriarchal ideology surrounding female sexuality at the time. This is a typical patriarchal text excluding references to women,⁵ while using female sexual depravity to humiliate opponents.

As discussed above, in ancient Jewish and Mediterranean culture, women were considered impure or unclean according to the purity system that society advocated. They could only be declared 'pure' by adhering to strict purification rites. Female sexuality was also constantly under suspicion and observation. Women had 'positive shame', meaning that they knew that they were responsible for their own 'sexual' reputation (honour) and therefore, concomitantly, the reputation of their family. But, because women were considered to be untrustworthy, weak and able to be perverted, female sexuality had to be protected by male family members, that is, brothers, fathers and sons. A woman who had lost her honour, was shamed, and had lost it forever and thus destroyed the honour and reputation of her family.

The frequent references to sexual depravity indicate a sexual vilification of the author's antagonists, and, as discussed above, sexual depravity had both explicit and implicit associations with women and therefore the author effeminated his opponents in his insults: they were deemed synonymous with everything negative associated with women and female sexuality (see Van der Watt & Kok 2008b:1820).

In contemporary context, to be 'effeminate' is an offensive or derogatory term used to describe a man whose behaviour, appearance, or speech is considered to be typical of that traditionally associated with women or girls, and who was weak through over-refinement or an absence of vigorous qualities (cf. Hornby 1996:370). Effeminate men represent the most fundamental failure of masculinity, that is, inability, weakness, a lack of maturity and eventually everything negative associated with women. In a culture of dominant masculinity, this applies to a man of uncertain worth regardless of his actual sexual preference. Simpson (in Bergling 2001:x) defines an effeminate man as "a man who surrenders, and lies down in the universal, friendly war of men against men – and deserts the ranks in the unfriendly sex war against women by failing to impregnate them". Therefore, effeminate behaviour is universally despised. It is in this light that the word 'sissyphobia' was created in order to indicate the fear of effeminate behaviour (cf. Bergling 2001:4). Gay culture has become even less tolerant of effeminate men than mainstream culture. To them, they are an embarrassment because they ridicule masculinity.

⁵ 'These men' exclude women from the opponents Jud 4,8,10,12,16.

Conclusion

Institutionalised patriarchy represents a system of systematic male dominance and the way it uses hierarchy, cultural power and social control to constitute itself (Ingraham 1994:204). Central to patriarchal hierarchy is ‘male’, ‘masculine’ and ‘manly’ behaviour referring generally to that which is rational, complete, superior, and active, while the terms ‘female’ and ‘effeminate’ are employed to designate opposite behaviour (Wilson 2002:151). Therefore, masculinity, as the default position, involves an exercising of power and dominance, which women should accept and submit to. The male’s active function is defined by mental and physical control. When a man is seduced by desire, he becomes weak and effeminate, the passive object of another’s designs and pleasures, revealing a loss of control. In the end, it would seem that desire’s most insidious quality lies in its potential to ‘unman’, ‘humiliate’ and ‘effeminate’ (Wilson 2002:155).

This is exactly what the author of Jude does in his rhetoric against his opponents when he attributes feminine qualities to ‘these men’. Their immorality is described in terms of female sexual depravity and therefore the opponents are rendered effeminate. They are like immoral women: impure, weak, adulterous, stained, natural, controlled (sodomised), and unable to control themselves. He legitimises his authority and hierarchy in the community by presenting true faith against heresy; saints or holy ones against ungodly; effeminacy as opposed to masculinity; and eventually heterosexuality against homosexuality. In this way he humiliates his opponents to the edge of his own dignity.

The author of Jude pulls out all the stops in his attack (cf. Callan 2004:42ff). Even Paul in chastising his adversaries cannot compete with this verbal attack. Maybe Jesus’ fulmination against the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23 comes closest to the attack of Jude, but at least it was not ‘below the belt’, so to speak! Moreover, Jude is a typical patriarchal text in which the author excludes women from his text, but uses cultural prejudices against women, and other marginal people like homosexuals, to command his leadership and maintain orthodox traditions and eventually to swear in female terms at his opponents. He effeminates his male opponents in order to display male power and hence sustain the patriarchal system. The Letter of Jude is an example of Hellenistic diatribe, insult, curse and verbal abuse used as a legitimate weapon against opponents. I agree with Brosend (2006:304) when he says: “The entire Letter of Jude is an *ad hominem* attack unworthy of the faith in whose name it was written”.

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