Ken Woodward, NEWSWEEK, 19 Jan 96 **FAX** #2766

In response to your answering-machine message today, I've mailed you some additional material on THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL. But I want to add this note on its social location:

When the maenadic frenzy of gender egalitarianism passes, this hymnal will be seen in its true light: not as a harbinger of the future but as hubridic flotsam from the past--as a good cause (political & economic equal treatment) overinflated into a bad cause (the utopian redesigning of the sexes, even of God [a la Gn.11.4, "a tower with its top in the heavens"]). One more proof of my signature saying that sin is any good thing extended far enough in a straight line.

Until 30 years ago, it wasn't noticed that the Bible, which is so rich that it can be quoted on both sides of scores of issues, can nowhere be quoted as addressing, or even referring to, God as feminine: God has no feminine titles, & not even once is a feminine pronoun used of him. In short, the biblical God is consistently masculine. From this explosive awareness came these **trajectories**:

1 **Denial.** In another connection, John Hick refers to metaphors elevated to metaphysics. Here, feminine metaphors for God, eg sophia, were heightened into divine titles (though clearly, sophia [in Prov.8 & sequels] is dramatized as no more than a handmaiden of God). In parallel, masculine titles for God were reduced, & the masculine pronouns for God were eliminated (as in the new UCC hymnal).

2 Admission & **rejection.** Some gender feminists jumped off the biblical train, gave up the biblical religions, Judaism & Christianity.

3 Admission & **deconstruction.** The Bible, according to this response, is indeed exclusively divine-masculine; but what else could you expect of a literary product of patriarchal-hierarchical societies? When reading it, we should wear the corrective lenses of "women's experience": what's not conformable to that way of seeing is not divine revelation.

4 Constructive **contextualization.** Women were more prominent than the Bible lets on, especially in the earliest Christianity.

5 **Acceptance.** Some of us, including me, accepted the datum--of which all had become aware--that the Bible's God is exclusively masculine in reference; & we affirm that this datum is a nonexpungeable characteristic of biblical religion: it is how God chose to reveal himself (his circle's point of tangency on the straight line of history & so of our lives).*

5 **Compromise.** A common move in the socalled mainline churches is to make what I consider a fatal concession to gender feminism, viz to discontinue all use of the masculine pronouns for God, while retaining the masculine titles (God, Father, Son, Lord, King, et al).

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* This position sharply distinguishes between theology (which is based on, & uses, the biblical language, including the Bible's way of speaking to-&-of God) & philosophy (which is free to speculate on what Pascal called "the god of the philosophers," Tillich's "God beyond God"). Radical feminist hermeneutics/theology fuses (confuses) the two, permitting to be said of God *theologically* only what gender-egalitarian *philosophy* allows. As philosophy is intellectual categorical abstraction, transcending such particularities as gender & personality, God fades away first in his gender & then (gender being a characteristic of personality) in his person. It's the devil's design: we begin with heightening the personhood of women, & end with compromising, or even denying, the personhood of God.