

REFLECTIONS ON CRAIGVILLE THEOLOGICAL COLLOQUY XIII

which ended this afternoon

1 "Where else can we go," said one participant, "for a comparable experience of face-to-face egalitarian wrestling with theology in life? Nowhere." All are equal in the small groups, whose work is the heart of these annual colloquies & whose final papers are published.... Of course not all are equal in the plenaries. Three who submitted pre-colloquy essays get to read the fruits of their labors, & the other essay writers are free to place copies of their essays on table-space provided for them. The Bible studies are led by eminent scholars noted also for their commitment to Christ & his Church (or "house" [Gk."ecu-menical"], as the quote above has it). Additional speakers are from ecumenical bodies & from other communions (Protestant, Roman, Orthodox)--who speak both with one another & with the other participants, & finally tell all how they see what's happened during the five days.... While most are of the United Church of Christ, always the participants include members from other denominations.... Though we try to get participants who are nonwhite & are never entirely unsuccessful, there is no such thing as a multiracial-multicultural style, & the colloquies' style is dialogical-dialectical (pejoratively, "Eurocentric") & centrally egalitarian (pejoratively, "American"). Those to whom our style is distasteful select themselves out, & there's nothing honorable we can do to bring them in: changing our style would be, we believe, dishonorable, lacking the integrity of our convictions. Do we then say other styles are wrong? No, only that other styles are other & we accept the scandal of our particularity.... I speak only of our colloquy style. We all in some other relationships do participate in other styles in/through which we relate with brothers & sisters who aren't "Eurocentric" & "American.".... Historically, our style was developed by white males, but white females have adapted so well to it that half the participants each year are white females. In our country & worldwide, nonwhites are learning to adapt to it as they realize that it will be in the future, as it's been in the recent past, the way of power: those who want power must, & will, learn our style.... Actual power, power in action, is something to be proud & ashamed of, not only ashamed of (as "victims" would have the powerful believe).... Power enables & (when its responsibilities are abused) corrupts.... Happy prediction: As the world becomes less resentful of & more realistic about our style, colloquies will be more multiracial-multicultural. And since that can't be forced now, it would be unrealistic, & an instance of false guilt, to apologize for the present monochrome.

2 The Colloquy theme? "How can we be both **catholic** & **prophetic**." All the group-papers said/assumed that we Christians, the Church, the churches should be both, but **none** said that our church, the United Church of Christ, was in any regard failing to be prophetic or catholic! It's as though the groups had done a school exercise in response to the assignment "Define 'prophetic' & 'catholic' & then describe the *ideal* relationship between them." To the *actual* faith/order/life/work of the UCC, **none** of them spoke directly. If the groups struggled to apply the agreed-on principle of maximum productive interaction between catholic & prophetic, none of the papers reflect this. More later on the one partial exception: The group I was in asked me to write up a "Disagreements" section to append to our report.

3 Why were the reports idealistic-academic? Throughout the thirteen Colloquies, we've asked the groups to conclude their papers with a section on "Disagreements," matters discussed but on which the group failed to arrive at consensus; but the urge to be agreeable ("nice," not "not nice," "unChristian") is so strong that seldom has a group complied. Tyrants of state & church are happy with the masses' self-absorbed loathing to resist authority from above (structural) or from alongside (interpersonal). Strengthening this **timidity** is the **fear** of what may happen if one does not "go along to get along.".... Failures here may occur along a spectrum: (1) We the oversight committee may fail to impress deeply enough the group-leaders' trainer that the papers are to conclude with what-we-couldn't-agree-on (whatever the wording); (2) The group leaders may resist the instruction; (3) The group leaders' efforts to convey the instruction may meet effective resistance by the group; (4, very common) Groups "run out of time, didn't get to the 'Disagreements' section."

4 Before further development of this Thinksheet, here is the **datum** promised in §2, viz. Group 4's "Disagreements" section, which the group asked me to write as a minority report:

Group 4 appointed one of its members to write its paper's concluding section, "Disagreements." The choice was felicitous in that all the disagreements came from that member, who agrees with everything in the paper but must file the following dissents:

1 This sentence is **inadequate**: "The catholic church...listens for the word of God in the entire canon of scripture," meaning 66, 80, or 81 books. This expresses a negative, viz. the limited **extent** of the literary listening. What needs to be added is the positive content, i.e. the biblical language-world, the actual words (original & in honest translation). But the group rejected the suggestion that the phrase read "the entire canon **and language** of scripture."

2 Like the first, the other dissent is from something which does not occur in the paper, viz. that the United Church of Christ, however prophetic it may be, fails the test of catholicity & of faithfulness vis-a-vis its official gender-language deviation from the Bible's primary vocabulary for speaking to and about God. To wit:

The Bible **always** refers to God pronominally as "he": in official UCC publications such as The New Century Hymnal, this catholic-universal practice **never** occurs. The absolute censorship of masculine pronouns for God results variously in serious theological distortions, mind-numbing repetitions of "God," and ambiguous referencing of the divine.

As for the canonical-catholic divine **titles**, almost all of which are masculine, the official UCC language-censorship code advises that the following be avoided where possible:

KING, though it's Judaism's central title in divine address. Avoid also the title-bearing abstract noun KING-DOM (though the Bible's parallel abstract words all bear the divine title KING).

LORD, though no English substitute for the word as well conveys the Bible's lord/servant, patron/client dynamic.* Further, LORD binds the Testaments together: in the OT, it translates the particular name of God; in the NT, it is the favorite title for Jesus.**

FATHER, even though it was Jesus' favorite way of addressing God, as in the Lord's Prayer.***

SON of God, which is to be degendered as "Child."

3 This dissenter believes that the prophetic voice of the canonical-catholic church should now be directed, in the UCC, against the degendered, faded, generic deity, in the name of the Bible's specific God with all his scandals of particularity, the triune God whom the church universal (catholic) worships as the Father, the Son, & the Holy Spirit.****

* Even though it's the Psalter's central title for God, "Lord" never occurs in the New Century Hymnal's Psalter.

** And so ensconced in "Jesus is Lord," the earliest Christian confession.

*** In the New Century Hymnal, none of these titles--"King," "Lord," "Father"--appear in the UCC Statement of Faith version included, though all three occur in the Statement of Faith itself (which is not in The New Century Hymnal).

**** This generic deity is unique in the history of religions--a deity claimed to be personal but never referred to by personal pronouns. This idea/pronoun compound is unstable & will break down into God as "it" (impersonal), God as "she" (goddess religion), & the canonical-catholic God as "he." Meanwhile, this generic deity centers a new religion which will have a short shelf-life.

5 As sex discrimination is biological-social, **gender censorship** is linguistic-theological. Its impulse is compliant with gender feminism, & its energy derives from the purity sanction (violators of the taboo code [in the UCC, officially called "Inclusive Language Guidelines"] are unclean, guilty of impurity, & are treated as have been the unclean always & everywhere, viz. by shunning, corrective instruction [e.g. Marxist "reeducation"], dismissal from employment, ostracism, torture, or even death)....**IRONY**: Marcus Borg's PhD dissertation says Jesus & Paul, in promoting compassion, demoted purity; but Borg himself promotes a particular purity, viz. gender linguistics, the audio form of gender feminism....Before long, somebody's going to do a PhD thesis studying the range of pressures, positive & (mainly) negative

incentives, used by the gender-censorship police. One discovery, I am confident, will be that liberal church leaders, ever sensitive to society's culture elite, ran lemming-like, thoughtlessly, off the linguistic cliff. Facing the culture elite, their motive was to be not-less-sensitive-than-thou: facing the gospel, their motive was to be faithful to its "essence": facing the church, their motive was pastoral & missional revisionism (pastoral, because some women were "hurting" from [code words] patriarchalism, the masculinity, hierarchicalism). They were set to do good, but the unintended destructive consequences are becoming ever more visible. One of the ecumenical observers told me privately that liberal-church officialdom's commitment to "inclusive language for God" is so strongly invested that they, & those who practice their gender censorship, "will be a long time" coming to repentance, returning to the biblical way of speaking to & about God. (PROBLEM: Colloquies' ecumenical observers tend to be gentle rather than frank in their public reports to the Colloquy participants.)

6 This Colloquy was unique in being the first to suffer an **invasion** of linguistically corrupt UCC-national-office literature. The morning the Colloquy opened, I discovered that The New Century Hymnal was to be put in the pews, in violation of ban against it, a ban of the Craigville Tabernacle Committee, which I chair. The compromise we worked out was to use both the Tabernacle hymnal (Pilgrim Hymnal, red cover) & TNCH (black cover). Liturgists could call for "red" or "black." Some used only red; none used only black, the red number being mentioned to supplement the printed black number (in which cases some sang from red, some from black, & the babble occasionally ended before the singing stopped, red & black not always having the same number of stanzas). After the Colloquy, two other participants helped me box & store the black hymnals: they could not be on the benches for Sunday worship, or I would immediately resign from the Tabernacle Committee (formally, the Worship & Education Committee).

Well, doesn't the black hymnal have "some good new stuff in it"? Of course it does, & the more it has the more demonic is the hymnal, the devil disguised as an angel of light: the overlay of the **new religion** (as defined in fn.**** of §4) on the old oppresses the canonical-orthodox God-language of Christianity, the old religion.

7 Refreshingly, the three participant-papers chosen to be read in plenaries were "prophetic" in the sense of the biblical quote preceding this Thinksheet's title. And the vigorous discussions in the plenaries, & probably in all the groups, were in contrast to generally abstract & unapplied principles enunciated in the group papers....A few quotes from the participant-paper lectures (which followed the papers closely but not slavishly): "Without a language of faith to retrieve our rich heritage, we cannot embody the Word we are called to speak to the world. As Barth says, '[The Church] exists...to set up in the world a new sign which is radically dissimilar to [the world's] own manner and which contradicts it in a way which is full of promise' [Church Dogmatics 4.3.2]]. The UCC can't be that church when the 'zeitgeist' [spirit of the times] has it by the nose." "The Holy Spirit is calling the UCC back to her moorings in the deep reservoir of the Church Catholic." "The prophets deconstruct not the tradition but the problems....Covenant faithfulness is the problem in every crisis." Vatican II's Lumen Gentium, 35: "Christ, the great Prophet,...continually fulfills His prophetic office....not only through the hierarchy...but also through the laity." "Test all things & hold fast to that which is good (1Thes.12.19-21)." "Don't start with the problem & then go to the tradition," as though you were saying "Given our political & social commitments, what in the tradition can we use anymore?"

8 On several fronts, **LORD** was an awkward word in the Colloquy. Gender censors attack the word on these grounds: (1) It's an antonym of "slave"; (2) It's a word of vertical ("hierarchical") relation; (3) It's masculine. But it's the central divine title binding the Testaments together (OT, of YHWH; NT, of Jesus). *Christianity is the only religion of which this is true.* Yet in the entire 270-page section following the hymns in The New Century Hymnal, this divine title **never** occurs.^{1b} "Psalms and Canticles" (122pp; "The Lord is my shepherd," Ps.23, is washed out into "God...God...God...."); in "Service Music" it occurs only in the Kurie

(749-50); & it occurs in the "Worship Resources" section only in fossil creeds ("fossil" in the sense that the hymnal immediately follows them with PC-bowdlerized "alternative version"s: 882 for the Apostles' Creed, 884 for the Nicene Creed; very revealingly the fossil [i.e. original] form of the UCC Statement of Faith does not occur, but only the PC-bowdlerized version, 885: the hymnal editor feared that congregations might use the original, Synod-approved form; & the omission is in direct contravention of Synod's will).

Against UCC officialdom's efforts to eliminate "Lord," the Colloquy's great Bible teacher emphasized its importance, esp. in Rev.1, where the risen Christ's lordship is set radically over against worldly claims of lordship, esp. that of Caesar....The world's "lords" are almost exclusively male, & the Bible's "Lord" (both Testaments) is exclusively masculine: all goddesses are idols, & all gods except the (masculine) biblical God are idols. It's devilish work to demasculinize the Bible's God just at a time when biblical religion is so embattled on the earth.

9 Colloquy printed worships were exclusively PC (gender censorship), but under pressure the leaders agreed to give the Pilgrim Hymnal numbers orally where TNCH numbers were printed. The worship committee's chair "didn't think there would be any problem" in using TNCH! (No Cape Cod UCC church uses TNCH in the pews.)

10 In suppressing the Bible's chief divine titles (all masculine) & in **never** using the Bible's pronouns for God (all masculine), the gender police have created an **idol**. I am said to be impolite & worse for attacking this idol. HISTORICAL NOTE: Christian Roman Emperor Justinian, toward the 4th c.'s end, closed down the Zeus-worshiping Olympic games, which were not revived till a c. ago (1896) as a pagan festival. Tonight, the opening ritual of the Atlanta Olympics featured Zeus & his entourage, & the world exec of the Olympics said they proceed "for the glory [not of God, as Christianity requires of all activities] but of sports." The gender censors think that the degendered biblical deity can compete with the vigorously masculine Zeus (sports as idol)!....Said exec said (to the approval of sports-worshippers) "Sports is life." And the goal? The Olympic motto is "Farther, Higher, Longer."

11 Do the Colloquies represent only one theological angle in the UCC? No, each year the self-selected planning committee (composed of volunteers from the immediately previous colloquy) has members of various "schools" (points of view) in the UCC. But since Craigville is one of the UCC "Confessing Christ" centers, a number of the regulars (repeaters, coming year after year) are "C.C." (i.e. affirmers of the UCC Constitution's Preamble, which confesses the biblical canon, the ecumenical creeds, & the central doctrines of the Protestant Reformers). The church-wide purpose of the Colloquies would be defeated were we to be placarded with the "C.C." image.

12 A Colloquy-surfacing subtheme of prophetic/catholic was **scripture/tradition**, a chicken/egg debate dividing lexically (i.e. in words) what can't be divided historically (since each emerges from the other) or existentially (since neither can be experienced apart from the other). The Roman Catholic paper-reader reminded us of the Lat. phrases "secundum scripturam" (according to scripture) & "contra scripturam" (against scripture), & spoke of "the neualgic area," what's outside of scripture as we seek to discern the will of God.

13 In canonical Christianity, the **critical** ("prophetic") & the **communal** ("catholic") principles derive from & converge in worship, the worship of a deity who cares, creates, commands, judges, offers forgiveness, restores. The good news, according to a retired-seminary-president participant, is that today's seminary students are more worship-minded: the bad news is that when this participant goes to worship in a UCC church, "what I get is ethics, not religion; I don't come out feeling I've been in worship." Without theocentricity, God-centering, "prophetic" deteriorates (as Kierkegaard said) into the merely ethical, & "catholic" rots down into ritualism.

At one point--Group 4's "Disagreements" section--the Colloquy converged the klieglights of prophetic & catholic on the UCC, which in replacing canonical-catholic language for God with political ("inclusive") language is failing both the prophetic & the catholic tests.