

THE DEVIL WANTS LIBERATION TO BECOME OPPRESSION

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

309 L.Eliz.Dr., Craigville, MA 02636

Phone 508.775.8008

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Dear Jim:

What a six hours you & I had of it yesterday! How grateful I am to you that you were willing to drive here from Boston, more than a two-hour trip, making it for you more than a ten-hour go! I cannot but honor your dedication & faithfulness in the needed work of producing THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL. I'd like my Thinksheet readers to get the feel of what we did in this public conversation, so I've included in this Thinksheet the program....The following **reflections** are on the experience yesterday & on some of the excellent materials you brought and we all worked on:

1 Properly, you emphasized that your committee worked **within the limits** set by our Church's '73, '77, & '79 General Synods, responsive to a long-brewing climate in our national bureaucracy, centering in the subculture of the Board for Homeland Ministries--a subculture I knew well as an employee in the '60s. My impression is that you could not have been a more loyal & competent servant working under "Inclusive Language Guidelines for Use and Study in the United Church of Christ" (Office of the President [Avery Post], June, 1980) generally, & specifically under "The New United Church of Christ Hymnal: Theological Guidelines" (Feb/92 revision).

The boldface in the ¶ immediately above signals my thinking, while writing that, about Kant's RELIGION WITHIN THE LIMITS OF REASON, an Enlightenment classic. As a tour de force, brilliant. Problem: Within those limits, religion can be oppressed but not expressed. A hymnal within the limits of **radical inclusive language** would be a hymnal in the self-canceling mode of oppressing the Bible while trying to express the Faith. It can't be done well, but (as Sam.Johnson Esq. said of a dancing dog) one must stand amazed to see it done at all. Again, when a teacher of mine complained, against an assignment I'd handed in, that "What's worth doing is worth doing well," my rejoinder was "But it wasn't worth doing." The new UCC hymnal was not worth doing within the severe, oppressive limits laid upon your committee. You did superbly well a job my conscience would not have permitted me to do at all. Only the "new century" future will tell which of us had the better part.

2 For my part, the future looks as presupposed in my presentation yesterday ("Guidelines for the Next Hymnal Committee," #2702). I anticipate (my "frontlash") our congregations' revulsion against the **radical** inclusive language of your hymnal (as great as in Tuesday's elections' swing from the Demos to the Reps). Some congregations will withdraw from the Church, saying "The hymnal was the last straw." Others will stay in but choose some **moderate**-inclusive-language hymnal: the UCC's is mainline churches' only radical-inclusive-language hymnal.

3 Can I sustain that your hymnal is, as alleged, **radical**? I can, & did yesterday, by comparison. It goes to ludicrous lengths to degender the biblical God. Not only is God *never* pronominally masculine ("he/his/him/himself") except when balanced with "She" (as in SAMPLER 18: "Her...His"); the general "Guidelines" (p.4; p.22 of your materials yesterday) says "We must move beyond the anthropomorphism applied to God." That means, on the face of it, we must surrender the notion of God as personal, the "form" of the human being as person being the model & warrant for referring to God as personal & to the "Persons" of the Trinity. Of course that Guideline means only that we should "surrender" the masculinity of the biblical God. But if we do, what have we left? A cosmic androgyne-hermaphrodite, a ghost ("spirit"), a genderless "process," Pascal's "the god of the philosophers" (ie the god of abstraction), Tillich's faceless "God beyond God," Whitehead's "process." A female prison chaplain said to me, "The women I try to help wouldn't want a genderless or feminine God; they tell me they need the masculine God, both to confront them & to compensate for the bad trips they've had with men."

The god the philosophers try to express is not the God worshipers can address. Deus revelatus, the God who's revealed himself to us so as to be addressable, is, in the Bible, *consistently* masculine, including in the context of his self-

name YHWH (Yahweh). If we boil off the "patriarchal culture" through which he came to the world in both Testaments, the residual "God" will not be recognizable as the biblical God; & the worshipers of the Residual God will be alienated from Scripture even more than their ignorance of Scripture makes them now aliens to it. As Barth would put it, the circle of God becomes, by his revelation, tangential to the line of humanity; & that point of tangency is "the humanity of God" in the anthropoMORPHic form of the Man Christ Jesus. To speak abstractly, the divine has a preferential option for presenting itself as masculine. Folks who find that biblical fact intolerably offensive are non- or post-Christian. Yesterday you showed yourself, in my opinion, **supersensitive** to them, too concessive to their complaint against our canonical Scandal of Particularity.

Craigville Theological Colloquy XII, 17-21 July 95, will be dealing with the issue of the acceptable degree of inclusive language: "The Baptismal Formula: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? A Theological Colloquy Exploring How We Speak Of God." The last sentence in my presentation yesterday bore on this: "I'm tempted to term the NCH an **exclusive**-language hymnal: it is so dogmatically driven to exclude the Bible's normal-natural [masculine] way of talking about God,...warning...not to talk about God the way the Bible does." If that warning is practiced, the children's children will consider the Bible a *curiosum*, a literary antique. Such descendants will not be in the Christian religion, though they may be in some radical-feminist gnostic derivative. To me you replied, "I, too, am concerned about alienation." How then could you work under Guidelines that are inherently alienating from canon, our Faith's literary authority?

4 So far in this Thinksheet I've been concerned about distortion, the Guidelines/hymnal's so warping (specifically, emasculating) the image of the biblical God as to alienate the folk & the future from the roots of our religion. But this Thinksheet's burden is elsewhere: its title adduces the oppression resulting from the Guidelines & their submissive literature, viz the UCC BOOK OF WORSHIP, the (UCC) NEW CENTURY HYMNAL, & educational materials. As we all know, the devil has devices for distracting the faithful from their "attending unto God" (to use a phrase of special punch in French). Many bromides warn against becoming a victim of his wile (I say "his" for the devil: women should say "her") for making the righteous self-righteous, the humble proud, the liberated oppressive. The UCC bureaucracy has had more than a score of years of priding itself on liberation from "sexist language." As it has slid into more & more radical forms thereof, its arrogance, & therefore intolerance, & therefore oppression of "deviants" has exfoliated. This poison has trickled down to the judicatory levels, making it difficult for pastors who don't "go along" to "get along," or even to survive in professional ministry. This Terror is "out there" to an extent that highly successful, strongly "in" (the inner UCC circles of power) pastors cannot feel. The Terror is great enough so that I fear soon many defections, jumps before kicks. And of course, pastors living under the Terror are not sale prospects for the new hymnal, which is itself a symbol of this oppression. (Historical analogy: My U. of Chicago doctoral dissertation explored the Christian mood in the "postapostolic-precatholic" period, the period just before the pagan-oppressed Christians became the oppressors of the pagans: "the devil wants liberation [in this case, Constantinian] to become oppression.")

5 At the beginning of #2701, I call the masculine pronominals for God "the priormost question in the 'inclusive language' debate." I've been sweating it a long time. '75-'76, Letty Russell & I taught a four-hour doctoral seminar nine months of Monday mornings & each of those noons had lunch together. She was writing her THE LIBERATING WORD, which came out the next year (Westminster Press). As you know, that book is the main authority behind the Guidelines. On pp.92-94, Letty advises to "avoid use of masculine role names for God, such as: 'Lord; King; Father; Master; Son.'....Avoid use of masculine pronouns in referring to God, such as: he, him....Avoid use of pronominal adjectives in referring to the attributes of God such as: his Love; his Mercy....Avoid use of the masculine pronoun for the Holy Spirit," though "She or It" is OK. (The only member of the Trinity, the NT says, to impregnate a human female!) Letty's whole passage was put into the Guidelines (p.5, your p.23)....Sin is anything extended far enough in a straight line. Hogarth's "The Rake's/Harlot's Progress." The slippery slide down into Sophia worship.

2703.3

We vote our opinions, but sing our souls.

We vote our opinions, but sing our souls.

And what we sing shapes our souls: Bible & hymnal are the two hands of spiritual formation.
So

"WHICH HYMNS SHOULD WE BE SINGING NOW?"

A Confessing-Christ Craigville Center event,
10am - 4pm 9 Nov 94
Herb Davis, Center Coordinator

Gathering till

Worship, orientation, introductions--Herb
Hymn on #2692, led by Willis
Scripture: Colossians 3.12-17 NRSV, read by Herb
v.16: "Sing psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs to God [mg "the Lord"]."

Prayers

Orientation on the Center & the day

Introductions of Jim & Willis

10.30 Triads: Suppose you were asked to present PH 199 ("Crown Him With Many Crowns") for inclusion in a hymnal. Would you make any changes? If so, what?

12 minutes of silent work in plenum, then

form groups of 3 and share (each giving the other 2 opportunity to speak!). Begin by choosing a reporter.

What happened? After each report, the other two members of the triad may comment. No comments from others till after all reports/comments: make notes on what you'd like to comment on.

If time remaining before lunch-break, Willis will begin his presentation:

12.10 Break for lunch, which will be at the Inn you may wish to comment on later.

12.30 Lunch

1.30 Willis completes his presentation, followed immediately by

Jim's presentation, including comments on Willis' presentation, then

Crawford-Elliott brief conversation, then

Open conversation till

3.55 Parting hymn: Sampler 35, or other
40 & 61

Great music plays the entire pianoforte of human feelings
which are the memory carriers of the soul
as it sings and
suffers and
shapes its destiny.

Great theology plays the entire pianoforte of human ideas,
which are the memory carriers of the mind
as it sings and
suffers in its
striving to make sense.

A great hymn marries great music and great theology. Therefore, it has no competitor for bringing peace and joy and power to enter through the gates of new life.