

"CONFESSING CHRIST" DIS/AGREEMENTS ON

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Today ended the three-day annual winter meeting of the national Steering Committee of "Confessing Christ,"

the honest-to-the-sources movement in the United Church of Christ.

In this meeting, we did not deal directly with the subject of this Thinksheet. And we've never attempted to state together what we believe on this subject: the Thinksheet is only a personal effort toward our doing so, in hope that the matter be taken up at our summer meeting & also possibly in conference calls.

My effort here is **weaker** than my personal opinion &, I think, **stronger** than the personal opinions of some others on the Committee. My personal opinion is that Christians should use the classical Christian language for God, which is the biblical practice of (1) using masculine titles & pronouns for God & (2) never addressing God by feminine titles or referring to him by feminine pronouns.

In speaking to/of God, Christians should....

- 1 Never worship, pray to, or refer to the divine as a goddess.
- 2 Never use the impersonal pronoun (it) in referring to the divine being, though this pronoun is proper in referring to such divine projections as the "Name" & the "Shekhinah" (Heb., "indwelling"--manifestation of the divine Presence in human life, or the principle of divine immanence in creation; in the Kabbalah form of Judaism, it's the 10th "sephirah" and represents God's feminine aspect).
- 3 Never use the feminine pronoun (she) in referring to God. This biblical-classical absolute is not violated when--following biblical-classical usage--we refer to "Hokhmah" (Heb., "Wisdom"; sometimes, e.g. Prov.8.22-32, called God's first creation; subsequently identified in Judaism with the concept of Torah, which then could be claimed to pre-exist the world--but also sometimes distinguished from Torah as not being restricted to Israel) by feminine pronouns.
- 4 Classics (Bible, creeds, hymns, etc.) have documentary integrity & are not to be "spun" in the interest of any ideology such as gender feminism. This stricture against "spinning" does not apply to such alterations ("alt.") as may be necessary to clarify authorial intent (e.g., "prevent" in 1Thes.4.15 KJV needs replacing by "precede" [NRSV]).
- 5 Because the current secular dogma of gender equality, & its language form (viz., gender feminism) mislead some into thinking that the Bible's God is male, we Christians should...
 - (1) highlight, in our witnessing-teaching-preaching-writing, the Bible's real though few allusions to the presence of the feminine in God; &
 - (2) de-emphasize the masculine terminology for God.
- 6 In Bible-quoting, use masculine pronouns for God only where they reflect same in the Hebrew-Aramaic-Greek originals--the practice, e.g., of the NRSV. (In §4, the Bible as a classic means the Bible itself, not any version or translation: the KJV is a classic only in the literary sense.) But do not quote translations suppressing the masculine by avoiding masculine pronouns for God where the original has a masculine pronoun. (NB a difference: Yes to "de-emphasizing" [§5], no to "suppressing.")
- 7 Accept, without qualification, the natural masculine terminology representing the fact that God's only self-presentation as a human being (i.e., incarnation) was as a male (God having a Son but no Daughter). (We should construe the masculinity of Jesus not as a defect in the Christian religion but as a strength, though this construal is anathema to gender feminism. [The defect construal led to The New Century Hymnal's silly bowdlerization of Christmas carols.]
- 8 The suggestion that masculine terminology for God should be de-emphasized does not include the masculine title "God." However, where God's masculinity is an impediment to gender-neutral speech, use "the deity" or "the divine [being]."

9 Use "Lord" as the primary term of address to God in the...

(1) Old Testament wherever the Hebrew is YHWH (God's self-announced Name, Ex.3.14n; NRSV continues the Eng.-versions practice of using all caps, "LORD"). (Even Ruth Duck, an inclusive-language radical, who "avoid[s] using *Lord* as a name for God," "affirm[s] what the name...means to Christian faith," viz. "obedience, allegiance, and self-giving" and "transcendent power," for "a God who was not just would not be loving" [10-14, "What to Do about Lord," UCBHM/96], though nowhere does she approve of submission, a frequent biblical note in "LORD" & "Lord" Jesus contexts, & cautions against the over/under note in transcendence. She makes the mistake of citing OT metaphors for God--e.g., "like a bear" & "like a lion" in Hos.13.8--as feminine names, but admits that all such in the Bible amount to no more than "a postage stamp" in comparison with the "football field" full of masculine names [my full response to her paper being #2804].)....All the substitutes for "Lord" reduce its fullness & fail to convey the affection of (e.g.) "The LORD is my shepherd." "Sovereign" speaks only of power; "the Eternal" is only an antonym of time; "the Holy One" designates only numinous distance; "the Living One" points only to the life-source; "SHE WHO IS" (Duck.11) violates §1 (above); "Savior" is limited to the note of deliverance (as is "Liberator")....But sometimes substitutes may be used for "Lord" where the Hebrew has some other word than YHWH.

(2) New Testament wherever the Greek is κύριος *kyrios* (which it almost always is), but feel free to use substitutes for other Greek names of God/Jesus.

IMPORTANT! "Lord" is the only designation representing, in the early Christian Bible (which was all in Gk.) the divine **continuity**, bond, bridge from OT through NT. All admit that no other Eng. title serves this function; generic "God" might if it didn't result in monstrosities such as "God Jesus" (for "Lord Jesus") & "the God Jesus Christ" (for "the Lord Jesus Christ").

10 Frequently use Jesus' most frequent name-title-designation for God, "Father." In OT & NT translating, all substitutes fall short of the texts' force.

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