27 Feb 96

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The Rev. Dr. Stephen E. Wayles

re your 14 Feb 96 letter to the editor of NEWSWEEK,
a copy of which I received not from NEWSWEEK
fax to Woodward

c to UCC Conference ministers,
as an addendum to #2773

Dear Steve,

You do me wrong not so much in mispelling my name as in asserting that I have been "opposed to the use of 'inclusive language' from the beginning of the debate." My record of being **for** inclusive language is long & includes years of rewriting the New York Theological Seminary's commencement-services hymns **to** inclusive language.

What I have consistently opposed is the **redesigning of God**, the biblical God, as though he were a tailor's dummy, twistable & dressable to suit the current fashion, which happens to be egalitarianism (as in Jesus-Seminar J.D.Crossan's re-invention of Jesus as an egalitarian peasant). Your committee labored under the hermeneutical control-principle of censorship mandates perfumed as "inclusive language guidelines." I regret that you seem to have been comfortable with that.

What I'm against, as my fax today to Woodward (c. here) makes clear, is the new religion piggybacking, in TNCH, on Christianity. In the pluralistic (= relativistic) atmosphere of today's American academy (resting unsteadily atop the country's growing tribalistic fragmentation, an ironic rerun of "separate but equal"), liberal religionists are scurrying to unburden themselves of biblical religion's scandal of particularity. In his SALVATIONS: TRUTH AND DIFFERENCE IN RELIGION (Orbis/96), S. Mark Heim details this process of mocking up a metatheology of religions by abstracting from embarrassingly concrete biblical religion some general principles which will augment rather than offending the Zeitgeist (& rightly shows how both inclusivism & exclusivism play around the edges of pluralism). Paradoxically & sadly, TNCH's way of leading into "the new century" is to follow the current fashion, "conformed to this world" (Ro.12.2). That's prophetic? Pathetic.

Woodward was correct in saying the Boylston meeting is to "air...complaints." The flier says it's "A Confessing Christ Consultation," & you are aware that "Confessing Christ" exits to air complaints against the UCC's drift away from the theology of its founding documents, in particular the Preamble to the UCC Constitution. The team "report[ing] its initial findings...is examining the NCH in the light of the theological standards of the UCC Constitution." The "Theological Guide for congregations" will take the form of warnings. You misread the promo material.

You are right that TNCH has "the traditional doctrines of the church," but wrong in your denial question "A new religion?" Nobody's saying TNCH is pushing nothing but a new religion. We are saying that the old religion lies underneath the new.

You say "each generation recites the Creeds." Is it to be in the bowdlerized versions of TNCH (881-7)?....On "America the Beautiful": (1) Bates didn't say our cities are "undimmed by human tears." (2) How can you say that Bates' use of "pilgrim" "has nothing to do with our Mayflower ancestors"? Her whole oeuvre shows that as did her Congregational-preacher father before her, she saw us as a pilgrim people & nation in descent from the hardies of 1620. (3) Like it or not, pilgrim feet did beat "a thoroughfare for freedom across the wilderness."....Thanks for repeating that Jn. Robinson said more light & truth is to "break forth from *his* Holy Word."....
You & I agree on most things. Not TNCH. Grace & peace,

Willis