Saturday, Craigville's Tabernacle (Worship/Education) Committee, which I chair, voted to purchase the most-appropriate-for-us inclusive language hymnal. A subcommittee, of which I'm not a member (but an ex officio consultant), will make the selection. That decision is the reason for this Thinksheet on.....

2923 10.19.98
ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS
309 L.Ellz.Dr., Craigville, MA 02636
Phone/Fax 508.775.8008
Noncommercial reproduction permitted

THE STAGES/POSITIONS ON INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN THE CHURCHES

STAGE #0

Most of the Christian congregations in the world are entirely unaffected by this past 1/3-century of feminist pressure on North-Atlantic-basin churches to refashion language under the criteria of gender "equality" & "fairness" to females. Craigville is in that basin & so in under that pressure.

STAGE #1

Beginning ca. ¼ c. ago & for my remaining years of teaching at New York Theological Seminary, I rewrote commencement hymns to horizontal (human-to-human) inclusive language. Eg, in the always-popular "Joyful, joyful," I found this an acceptable revision: "Father love is reigning o'er us, brother, sister, race and clan" --the original being "Father love is reigning o'er us, brother love binds man to man." I remember, as through the years of attending meetings in the building of the National Conference of Christians & Jews, how increasingly embarrassing became the motto beautifully carved in a stone arch over the entrance on 52nd St. (Manhattan): "THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD AND THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN." More & more sisters felt left out of "brotherhood." (A century ago on campuses, "sororities" sprang up alongside "fraternities": that long ago on campus, the generic word "fraternity" had become masculine.) (While the abstract "brotherhood" occurs in the Gk.OT, the NT has only the concrete meaning "the brotherhood, the Christian community"[& then only twice: 1P.2.17, 5.9]. "Fatherhood" --abstract or concrete--has noancient Gk. parallel on the "father" root *patri-*, though on the roots *gen-* & *tek-*; one could speak of the all-source or "father of all," but not of "father-ness [-hood]" --but for the Jews & even moreso for the Christians [Jesus' favorite appellative for God being "Father"], God's father-ness was warm, domestic, concrete [in the sense of not merely metaphoric: masculine in reference though of course not in being].)

My research, including conversations with eminent hymnologists, turned up no available hymnal meeting this spec. I can confidently state: no Stage #1 hymnal. Closest to it is THE WORSHIPING CHURCH: A HYMNAL (Hope Pub. Co./90), which is nondenominational-evangelical (in the broad sense: not fundamentalist). Its language for God is less affected than that of any other inclusive-language hymnal by embarrassment about the Bible's **exclusive masculinity in gender titles & in pronouns for God.** For this reason, & because (in contrast to the other inclusive-language hymnals) it is nonsectarian, it would be my choice for Craigville Tabernacle congregational use.

STAGE #2

Stage-#2 inclusivists, because they are more embarrassed-offended at the Bible's exclusive masculinity in gender titles & in pronouns for God, are more willing, in speaking of God, to **deviate** from the Bible's usage. On our geometric analogy, to the horizontal (human-to-human) language-inclusivism they add a moderately vertical dimension. They may limit this practice to personal usage, or impose it on literature --esp. on the Bible. They may limit their language-for-God change to dropping our religion's pronouns for God (with or without exceptions such as Ps.23). They may drop particular gender titles for God (eg, Father, Lord, King) &/or add feminine ones (most often, Mother). But they are conservative, not eager to lay the old aside while providing for the new. The resulting straddle appears (eg, in the current METHODIST HYMNAL [1989]) as the printing of the old & a new form of a hymn side by side (a practice I encouraged for the current UCC hymnal, but failed to persuade the authorities that we needed a hymnal that would "offend everybody" pari passu). Because of its virtue of inclusivity (ie, including old/new linguistic usages & thus diversity of personal-&-congregational preferences), my second choice for Craigville Tabernacle congregational use would be the current METHODIST HYMNAL (with "CRAIGVILLE HYMNAL" rather than "METHODIST HYMNAL" on the cover) despite its denominational source.

+

STAGE #3

Stage-#3 inclusivists, because they are intensely embarrassed-offended at the Bible's exclusive masculinity in gender titles & in pronouns for God, practice the greatest deviation from scriptural language for God: they are radically vertical (as well as more radical horizontally). The old is despised: in THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL (UCC/95), the denomination's Statement of Faith (having 17x usages of our religion's pronouns for God) does not appear along with a radical-feminist version thereof. Of course TNCH *never* uses any of the Bible's pronouns for deity, & its excision of the Bible's gender titles for God is radical: eg, "Lord" never appears in the Psalter (even though it's almost 900x in the Christian OT, the LXX [where it's the bridge to the NT "Lord" Jesus & is thus foundational to the Christian doctrine of God]). The redesigning of the deity in the UCC's new hymnal is so radical as to be blasphemous, & a number of the Tabernacle Committee (including me) could not worship regularly in the Craigville Tabernacle if this hymnal were chosen for congregational use.

To select a **moderately** inclusive-language hymnal for the Tabernacle, why not wait? A long wait, too long (though in #2702 I laid out what I consider the proper "Guidelines for the Next Hymnal Committee"). It might not be amiss to remind my readers, in brief, of those guidelines. I pray for a hymnal meeting these specs (which I included in my proposed agenda for the 10.17.98 Tabernacle Committee meeting):

(1) **Ecumenical**--nonsectarian, nondenominational. Publishers' motivation low: church-family (denominational) hymnals sell well.

(2) **Classical**, with only such changes in the great hymns as changes in the Eng. language require (eg, "suffer" no longer means "permit," & "let" now means the opposite of "hinder"). A current debate among Eng. users: will/should the generic "man/kind" die out (yielding to, eg, "person," human being," humanit," "humankind")? To judge from scientific ("nature/man") & literary ("man & his world" [Boorstin]), probably not--though I don't object to a moderate amount of substitutions in the old hymns. Generic "brother/hood," however, should die out. I'm unsympathetic to dumpers of "thou/thine/thee" (with their attendant verb-forms): (1) In THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL, eliminating these 2nd-person words in some hymns (eg, the German-Reformed classic, #457) has resulted in horrendous theological betrayals (as detailed, in the case of this hymn, by G.Fackre on pp92f of HOW SHALL WE SING THE LORD'S SONG? [Craigville: Confessing Christ, 1997]); (2) The same hymnal has the 1st line of the truly great hymn, #507, substituting "me" for "thee"--the whole bowdlerization showing to what degree of contortion the radical exclusion of "thou/thine/thee" can go. (Jas.Crawford, chair of TNCH committee: "We ran into a lot more trouble on this than we expected to.")

(3) **Multicultural**, multi-ethnic, without loss of the Anglo-American traditions foundational to the general American culture & pietly.

(4) **Contemporary**--new material representing present-day concerns & sensitivites.

"God is subtle but not malicious. **He** would not have made us rational unless **He** had created an intelligible universe."--Einstein, so quoted by Dan.Boorstin (former Librarian of Congress) on "Lehrer," 10.26.98. The continued use (in biblical translating, in quoting classical literature, & in personal practice) of Christianity's **pronouns for God** helps to keep the rumor alive that God is personal, personally creates & personally loves His creatures. The substantivitic evasion of these pronouns ("substantivitis" being the disease of overusing nouns) is literarily ugly & theologically fatal though not religiously so: (1) "theologically": the Bible's personal deity fades out; (2) "religiously": New Age's impersonal supernatural may continue to flourish, as in the current long-time best sellers, Donald Walsch's two volumes of CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD, which J.Budziszewski calls "theoretical pantheism" in the form of "practical metheism [me-theism = I am God]." FT (Oct/98) p92 comment: "God can experience itself only through parts of itself that...have consciousness. That's you & me. But All Things is all there is. So we're not just parts of God--we're God. But there is only one of us. So God is Me."