

# INCLUSIVE-LANGUAGE HYMNODY

# 2205 18 Jan 88

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

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

Phone 617.775.8008

Noncommercial reproduction permitted

OCCASION: As chair of Craigville's Worship Committee, I must face once again the questions signaled in this Thinksheet's title. The following notes are for the next meeting of the committee, which will consider whether to purchase, for use in the Craigville Tabernacle, to be used in addition to THE PILGRIM HYMNAL (1958), INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE HYMNS (1984), which First Congregational Church, Amherst, MA, published from the plates of PH (1958).

1. There's now no excuse for writing & publishing sexist-language hymns. Which leaves us with the hairy problem of defining "sexist language."
2. Also, there's no excuse for butchering the old hymns. Which leaves us with the hairy problem of defining "butchering." For years, I desexized the hymns for N.Y.Theol.Seminary's commencements, but didn't butcher.
3. There's a cultural & moral difference between desexizing a hymn for a specific occasion, & publishing a desexized hymn under the original author's name. I say yes to the first, but cannot bring myself to say yes to the second unless the changes are minimal. Which leaves us with the hairy problem of defining "minimal."
4. I regret that I cannot recommend to the committee the use of ILH:
  - (1) It's got dishonest bowdlerization of classics. Eg, John Bunyan 371 (the numbers of ILH corresponding to the numbers of TPH): The classic-quaint "Since, Lord, thou dost defend us with thy Spirit" has become "War-monger nor dope-fiend can daunt our spirit." Bunyan would recognize this, or even believe it? Our action is substituted for God's. The prayer form is reduced to flatness; an expression of trust in God is replaced by a statement of our defiance. The unstated openness of what we need protection against is now a targeting in on two specific enemies....The intro's talk of "amending" & "adapting" the hymns cannot cover this outrageous rewriting. And excessive to ILH's express aim: What's such butchering got to do with sexist language?
  - (2) Theological changes having nothing to do with sexist/inclusive lg. are a second violation of integrity. Eg, 155: "Redeemer" becomes "Master."
  - (3) Metaphors are mixed, lowering the literary quality of the original. Eg, 155 again: One may give "all glory, laud, and honor" to a "King" (the original), but not to a "Friend" (the ILH substitution--twice!).
  - (4) The strained antisexism appears in distaste for "mothers" as well as "fathers." Eg, 29: "mothers" becomes "parents"! Such inanity the church should have been embarrassed to print. Reminds me of the "ANTI-SEX" posters in Geo. Orwell's "1984." Part of the pathos in all this "inclusive lg." business is that attention to sex, instead of being neutralized, is intensified. In ILH, anxiety about "sexist lg." reaches the pathological level.
  - (5) The he-his-him horror. Using the masc. pron./pronom.adj. for God is as absolute a no-no as the ancient Jewish proscription against pronouncing YHWH. I respect the latter but can only feel pity for the de-historical, revisionistic project of the former. So pervasive is the masculine metaphor for God in our biblical religions that efforts to expunge it must be declared ludicrous at the least. It's pathetic to witness, in ILH, the 100s of twistings & turnings to get rid of this personal pronominal way of referring to the divine.
  - (6) The anti-masculine bias of ILH vis-a-vis God leads to a depersonalizing pattern, abstractions being substituted. I want to keep this Thinksheet one-page, so I'll not give you my long list here. Eg: "his grace" often becomes just "grace," as "his" is dropped from "bounty," "counsel," et al. "He" doesn't send blessings, "love" does.
  - (6) Male nouns for God are radically eschewed. "Father" is esp. hated even in the trinitarian formula (required for UCC baptism & membership). And of course down with "King(dom)," "Son," "Brother," sometimes "Dord."