

THE SAD VICTORY OF SENSIBILITY OVER SENSE

A commentary on the interior convergence of a humorous incident yesterday & a serious film today

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1 In a national meeting yesterday, I responded accurately to an indirect attack on something I'd written. Instead of complaining to me, the attacker had done so to prominent others, asking them to pressure me against distributing my one-page summary of his (& two others') "The UCC Hymnal Committee: Its Process and Work (1990-1993): An Alternative Report." (My precis was signed "summary by W.Elliott.") The complaint--again, indirect!--was not that anything I wrote was inaccurate, but that the attacker didn't like "the tone." The humor in the incident? Someone in the audience sang out these words: "And they'll know we are Christians by our love."

For whom did the singer intend the barb? Perhaps both me & the attacker, who certainly did not exhibit Christian love in his cushion-shot, indirect attack. And did the singer exhibit Christian love?

I'm taking the incident as an opportunity to "do theology": I wouldn't bother myself or you to report on a small dust-up in the political history of THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL. So I do not name the attacker: his name is of no consequence vis-a-vis what this Thinksheet is getting at.

2 My motive in producing the summary of the many-page, prolix "Alternative Report" was to make its message more **available** & to honor the three dissidents who wrote it. The document is clearly, specifically, a dissenting opinion; but (I'm told) the attacker rejected my (precise, accurate) term "dissidents"--as though I'd said something untrue or inaccurate. It's a characteristic of today's intimidated mainline white-male clergy to tread softly & carry no stick at all--ie, to behave wimpishly, with a defensive delicacy of diction. Since those who refuse to live within the verbal prison of PC & DU (delicate-utterance) tabus are many-ways punished, not least in being shut out from further employment, gifted & energetic white males turn away from church occupations, do not seek ordination. Dismal projection: Tomorrow's mainline white clergy will consist of aggressive females & wimpish males. I expect so: I pray not.

3 Anyone wanting my 1-page summary of "An Alternative Report" may have it for the asking: I wrote it not for general Thinksheet distribution but only as an aid to those who would not read through the long original. It contains no misquotations or distortions & does not violate the "tone" of the original. Indeed, could any 1-page summary better convey the original's tone? Consider a few quotations in the summary from the original: (1) The hymnal committee, in not being allowed to vote (though they'd expected to do so, as a General Synod committee), "was 'used' by BHM [the UCC Board for Homeland Ministries]." When my attacker discovered he was being "'used,'" why didn't he blow the whistle, go public on the deception & betrayal? For failing to do so, & thus betraying the committee's commission & thus the UCC churches & their members, my attacker was a traitor. But in yesterday's meeting, I did not name him such. I was content to call him, accurately, a "wimp." (2) "Had the committee been allowed to vote on most issues, it is probable that a majority of 7 (out of [the] 13) would have sided with most of the concerns here represented." So what the UCC got was a hymnal not representing "the concerns" of the "majority" of the members of the General Synod's hymnal committee! Not one wimp, but the "majority" of the committee, which the dissidents admit "was 'used' by BHM"! So we, the members of the UCC, got used by BHM &, by failure to whistle-blow, the majority of the committee! (3) What do you make of the "tone" of this: "We were being asked to create a hymnal in the image of UCBHM ideology, rather than a hymnal to serve the needs of congregations across the UCC." Asked, in violation of Synod's intention! (4) "We [discovered that] we were, in essence, if not in name, the UCBHM Hymnal Committee, not the UCC Hymnal Committee." (5) UCBHM staffers took the minutes & gave the appearance of peace where there was no peace: "no mention of the serious discussions and disagreements that had developed in the committee concerning language use in hymns" (on "the second report"): "what eventually came to light as the UCBHM's guiding principle concerning the hymnal: **radical inclusive language**" (bf mine). (6) "Additions and corrections to the minutes were never +

called for." (7) "The Hymnal Committee never voted on the Language Guidelines." (9) When the committee proved insufficiently compliant with the BHM staff's wishes, the staff replaced it with an "Advisory Committee": "UCBHM had no synodical authorization to constitute a second panel to complete the hymnal....The new Editorial Panel contained no UCC musicians." (10) BHM is guilty of "deceptive advertising," eg in the video's "no indication of the scale and scope of the language changes which have been made in familiar hymns." (11) Even the Advisory Committee proved insufficiently compliant ("absence of working consensus"), so the Exec. Comm. of BHM solved the problem in the simplest manner: the Synod's commission of a committee was abandoned, & the project was turned over to the BHM staff. (12) BHM created the illusion of wanting a participatory hymnal by surveying & holding nation-wide forums but not taking the data seriously: "as with the survey material, the impression was given that the 'input' part of the forums existed only to make those attending feel they had been heard." The forums' data "were never collated in any form which could be consulted to influence decision making."

4 The other two dissidents expressed concern that the hymnal be pastoral as well as prophetic, but their concern was disregarded. The futuristic pitch was BHM's, not the committee's: the committee never got to vote on the hymnal's title, which came out as THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL. The hymnal's editor, at the 1994 annual meeting of the Hymn Society of America, said that the hymnal's main emphasis is on inclusive language and pluralism, while the "roots and heritage [of the UCC] seemed to play little part in the hymnal's makeup" (dissidents' report: p.39, Oct/94 THE HYMN)....A radical feminist biblical scholar was added to the committee without consulting the committee (obviously, I add, to subdue the committee into supinely taking BHM-staff dictates)....The original document, & my summary, name names: in this Thinksheet, I've not, as it would not serve its purpose.

5 I wrote my summary for use by the "Confessing Christ" workgroup on the hymnal. When NEWSWEEK asked me for materials on the hymnal, I included my summary of "An Alternative Report," with this description: Here "is my summary of a paper of hymnal-committee dissidents, detailing the highhandedness & even foul play in the production of the hymnal. The Synod [governing UCC body] commissioned a UCC hymnal, but BHM [the producing board] didn't even allow the hymnal-committee members to vote! This antidemocratic behavior, inside a denomination that prides itself on being democratic, is traitorous & shameful. Cause? The ideological arrogance of the radical feminism that controlled the whole process."

6 "Humorous" is the way I described the singing incident (§1), but the singer's tone was snide. No matter. But what she sang matters: Is it indeed "by our love" that we Christians are to be "known"? Why not by our truth (honesty, frankness, honor) & by our love--indeed, our love through truth--sensibility, but also sense? The ditty unintentionally expresses a defect in the Christian religion, viz its tendency to sentimentality, to sloppy agape, the American political expression of which is well displayed in Marvin Olasky's THE TRAGEDY OF AMERICAN COMPASSION (1992), which Newt Gingrich recommended as required reading to understand the need for welfare reform. Unfortunately--indeed, disastrously--mainline church leaders can be counted on to come down on the side of sappy sentimentality in defense of the sacralized individual & baptized egalitarianism.

7 Contrast the **balance** of truth/love, sense/sensibility in the serious film I saw today, a Jane-Austin-renaissance flick, "Sense and Sensibility." Those who play the victim card can manipulate sentimentals by beginning their creed with "I hurt..." (rather than "I believe..."). Jane Austen (d.1817), in her novels, thoroughly explores human experience from within human awareness of feelings & thoughts, with need of no garish outer events. She was of a wholesome, intellectual, & joyful clergy family, of good balances. Critical-comic intelligence was cultivated within philanthropy, ie love of humanity. She parodied sentimental-romantic cliches with a gritty honesty about human beings, especially human relations. Like the logo of a small yin in yang & a small yang in yin, her two central characters in SENSE AND SENSIBILITY reveal a double balance. Elinor (Sense) is not cold, unemotional, priggish; & Marianne (Sensibility), though seemingly flighty & selfish, does not lack intelligence or generosity. Life-like, they aren't stick figures, as in an allegory.

NEW HYMNAL

notes from MS of David Bowman, Nancy Livingston Goff, Margaret Tucker--dissidents from the UCC hymnal committee

"The UCC Hymnal Committee: Its Process and Work (1990-1993): An Alt. Report"
(summary by W.Elliott)

Ansley Coe Throckmorton called for a "hymnbook expressing the faith of the church in our time." But what was produced was a hymnal for a supposed future time, "the new century"--a title the committee did not get to vote on.

Little voting: "had the committee been allowed to vote on most issues, it is probable that a majority of 7 (out of [the] 13) would have sided with most of the concerns here represented."

"We were being asked to create a hymnal in the image of UCBHM ideology, rather than a h. to serve the needs of congregations across the UCC." Change of aim: "by the time the committee was prematurely dismissed in 1993, it was made quite clear to us by UCBHM staff that our responsibility was only to UCBHM, whose Exec. Comm. (not Gen. Synod) would give final approval to, or rejection of, the hymnal. We were, in essence, if not in name, the UCBHM Hymnal Committee, not the UCC H.C."

"Some members" concluded "that the expensive process of obtaining the data was done only to make the congregations feel they had input into a new hymnal, not to infl. any real decision making; and that the survey info. was not used seriously...bec. it did not support what eventually came to light as the UCBHM's guiding principle conc. the hymnal: radical incl. lg."

"as with the survey material, the impression was given that the 'input' part of the forums existed only to make those attending feel they had been heard." The forums data "were never collated in any form w. could be consulted & infl. decision making."

UCBHM personnel took the minutes, which do not reflect the un-peace! "The 2nd report...makes no mention of the serious discussions and disagreements that had developed in the committee concerning lg. usage in hymns....3rd report: "The lack of consensus slowed the work of the Advisory Comm. on the Hymnal (the name given to the Hymnal Committee by BHM after its dismissal)....It was the judgment of the UCBHM Exec. Comm. that this absence of working consensus could not readily be resolved within the Advisory Comm. on the Hymnal." So the project was turned over to UCBHM staff!

"deceptive advertising," no blick as to the radical extent of lg.-changes; in the video, "no indication of the scale and scope of the lg. changes w. have been made in familiar hymns."

Ed. Arthur Clyde's presentation to the 1994 Ann. Meet. of the Hymn Soc. of Am.--reviewed in Oct/94 THE HYMN, p.39: the main emph. of this hymnal is on incl. lg. & pluralism, while the "roots and heritage [of the UCC] seemed to play little part in the hymnal's makeup."

"our meetings were not 'business' meetings with motions to be voted on, the minutes tended to be general in nature. Also, additions and corrections to the minutes were never called for."

The sugg. of Goff & Tucker that the hymnal be pastoral as well as prophetic was disregarded. "The Hymnal Comm. never voted on the Lg. Guidelines," w. were imposed by A.Throckmorton & UCBHM exec. T.Dipko. Comm. not consulted when Sharon Ringe added as full voting member. Staff tightened the loose guidelines: "no gender lg. for the Deity would appear in this hymnal" (not staff qt.). "UCBHM had no synodical authorization to constitute a 2nd panel to complete the hymnal," but did so. "The new Editorial Panel contained no UCC musicians." Dipko had req'd. Comm. to follow BHM lg. guidelines. The Comm. "was 'used' by BHM." Pp.18-19: "Some Suggestions for Future Hymnal Committees." (Cp. W. Elliott's #2702, "Guidelines for the Next Hymnal Committee.")



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Dear Mr. Bowman,

Thank you for your long-temperate-informative letter of the 4th. Copies of my response are going to 2--Trost & Fackre--of the 4 to whom you sent copies of your letter. You may want to send copies of my response to the 2 others, viz. Goff & Tucker.

Of course my #2768 would have been worded slightly differently if I'd had the fill-in you've provided me over the phone & in your letter of the 4th. For one thing, I'd have used your word "dissenters" rather than "dissidents," which (you are right) "has the possible denotation [rather, connotation] of 'disaffected'....Perhaps we are more disillusioned than disaffected." Clearly you 3 dissenters, while not so vis-a-vis UCC, are "disaffected" vis-a-vis BHM, that rough beast slouching toward the New Jerusalem without benefit of Synod. (I did describe yours as "a dissenting opinion.")

I admire your courage in making early efforts (of which I didn't know) to swim against the BHM radical-language current. As an active pastor, you're far more vulnerable than I, a retiree. "Wimpish" is what I thought of you 3 wholly on the basis of your "Alternative Report," which does not recount--as you did to me first on the horn & then in yours of the 4th--your efforts to be heard oppositionally beyond the confines of the hymnal committee.

Thanks for saying that my effort at "gathering up the content and tone of our document" was "well done." I cry out against unfairness, & so struggle against being unfair--which isn't easy, as the subtitle of my FLOW OF FLESH, REACH OF SPIRIT indicates: "Thinksheets of a Contrarian Christian."

NOTE on the use of strong language: Great UCC biblical theologian Paul S. Minear, in his slashing attack on the UCC BOOK OF WORSHIP (Spr/88 PRISM), thus defends strong language: "In posing my questions so bluntly I realize that these strictures will appear biased and unfair to members of the editorial committee. Perhaps they are. But to state issues bluntly, without the normal set of judicial qualifications, may better serve the interests of churchwide theological discussion than the subject merits." I remember him as a gentle, searching teacher of mine, which I myself (believe it or not) am reputed to have been.

As I wrote #2768, I tried to bear in mind how difficult it is to tell other people what they should have done in circumstances one has not oneself experienced. But I had the advantage of having been 9 years on the BHM staff: you were, you say, a "novice" to their arrogant modus operandi. I was, I think understandably, distressed that you did not resign from the hymnal committee when, very early in its life, you discovered that the committee was powerless to make decisions or even to vote on / revise session minutes. You say that it was only much later that you surmised the committee was being "used" by the BHM staff. Didn't you know it by the second meeting?....My distress was compounded by my disappointment that those of us who fought for a fair hymnal from the start did not have the support your disengagement from the committee would have afforded.

As for the abuse you've taken as a putative "destructive influence," tell me about it: my own experience of church institutions gives me a deep feel for the layman who told you he "had never encountered such behavior in the secular world." You are being punished for not being "ideologically conformist"--punished by fundamentalism on the left.

"Lead, kindly Light....one step enough for me."

Grace & peace,