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CHRISTMAS CAROLS ASHAMED OF JESUS

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A study of the Christmas section of THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL (Pilgrim Press/95)

Jesus says he'll be "ashamed" of those who've been ashamed of him (M.8.38, L.9.26; "denies," Mt.10.33, L.12.9). In 1774, ten-year-old Jos. Grigg wrote a famous hymn you'll not find in NCH. It's 1st stanza: "Jesus! And shall it ever be / A sinful child [later, "a mortal man"] ashamed of Thee? / Ashamed of Thee, whom angels praise, / Whose glories shine thro' endless days." The 5th (&, in the original, last) stanza ends "And O, may this my glory be, / That Christ is not ashamed of me!" (The 1st & last lines of the other hymn he's famous for: "Behold, a Stranger at the door!....And let the heavenly Stranger in.")

A few more passages: "I am not ashamed of the gospel" (Ro.1.16); "Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord" (2Tim.1.8; v.12: "I am not ashamed...[of] the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able"); "Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers [NRSV adds "and sisters"]" (Heb.2.11); "Abide in the Son..., so that when he is revealed we may...not be put to shame before him at his coming" (1Jn.2.24-28).

1 A few days ago we all learned that American public education is so ashamed of the predominance of the white male in Am. history that our chn., who can tell you who Susan B. Anthony was, don't recognize the name of the inventor of the light bulb, audio-recording, & the movies: Thos. A. Edison, with a thousand patents to his name (*human* history's most productive inventor), had the misfortune of being (ugh!) white & (ugh!ugh!) male. Only 4% of the chn. recognized his name!

These PC-brainwashed chn., & the UCC's new hymnal, are (mis)shaped for each other. The former shamefully is ashamed of the male: the latter is, for the same reason, ashamed of Jesus. The evidence I'm adducing for the latter--evidence that could be gathered throughout this trendy, ephemeral hymnal--I'm taking only from the Christmas/Epiphany sections.

#156 ("Brightest and Best") has been entirely desexed: in line with this hymnal's embarrassment about calling Jesus God's "Son," in this version of the popular carol he's nobody's son! Born sexless, or maybe hermaphroditic. A neoDocetism: he only "seemed" to be male, & in this carol not even that. It's an envelop hymn, the last stanza repeating the 1st; but in NCH, the last stanza, as containing "sons," is elided; & in the 1st stanza, "stars" is substituted for "sons"--converting Jesus into an astronomical phenomenon, a conversion that would have astounded the hymnist, who meant to elevate Jesus above all other male leaders: "Brightest and best of the sons of the morning...." Again, referring to God by masculine pronouns is an absolute no-no for this hymnal (though for the Bible, which never once uses a feminine pronoun for God, masculine pronous for God are an absolute yes-yes). But what of the case of Jesus, since honest history can't doubt he was male? Not in this hymn, which eliminates all five instances of the masculine pronoun for Jesus.

What we are faced with here is a **hatred** of the masculine that has the same root--radical feminism--as the public-school establishment's hatred of the masculine in the teaching of history. I am disgusted by the public schools, & I am ashamed of my church.

#124 ("Away in a Manger") is ashamed of the fact that the manger was "his" bed, so converts to "a" bed. Too, since the vertical (hierarchical!) is on the hymnal's censorship guidelines, Jesus cannot "look down from the sky" even though the hymnist intends it as a parallelism with "stars in the sky" as a subtle anti-astrological reference parallel with the Bethlehem star itself: God-Jesus guides the stars, so look to God-Jesus & not to the stars for your life-guidance.

#126 ("Angels, from the Realms of Glory") is, as throughout the hymnal, ashamed to call Christ "King," even though in this carol the word is the periodic punch ending every stanza, the last word of the refrain: "Worship Christ, the newborn King!" Use some other hymnal if you want to sing "King" in this great carol.

#128 ("In the Bleak Midwinter") is ashamed to call Jesus "Lord" even though for the early Christians it was the main way of referring to the Jesus/believer relationship

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("Christ" having soon been taken up into his name) & the only title in the earliest Christian confession, viz "Jesus is Lord." While NCH once uses a masculine pronoun for Jesus (viz, "his mother"), 4x (4 times) masculine pronouns are dropped. So "What can I give him" becomes the weaker "What can I offer." And stupidly, the reference to the Wisemen from the East disappears into "If a were a wise one."

What do you suppose has become of "Joy to the World!" (#132)? Though ashamed of the next words ("the Lord is come"), they are retained in deference to tradition, but the footnote says "the Sovereign comes" "may be sung." (NOTE: This deference vis-a-vis the Christmas carols does not apply to less familiar traditional hymns, which you then may expect to be even more brutally butchered.) All 8 instances of masculine pronouns for Jesus are eliminated, & 6x "God" is substituted for Christ--a theological disturbance that would flip the hymnist! (The NRSV policy of inclusive language for the horizontal [human/human] only would be good for a hymnal. In this hymn, I agree with "Let men [change to "all"] their songs employ.)

#133 ("O Little Town of Bethlehem") drops the original indirect reflections of (1) the beatitude "Blessed are the meek" (2) the Kingdom of God ("And praises sing to God the King"), the hymnal being ashamed both of "King" & of the traditional Englishing of the Lord's Prayer's second petition ("Thy Kingdom come"). And of course it drops the 3x uses of the masculine pronoun--all of which messes up the God/Christ intimacy of Phillips Brooks' original....But this hymnal gives massive evidence of caring more about radical-feminist language-taboos than about theology. What makes this hamfisted, woodenheadedness pernicious is that *what people sing becomes their theology*. Are you willing to let "new century" Christians' theology be set by ideologs whose thinking is fixed not by considerations of the biblical-historic Christian mind but by the current version of political gender egalitarianism? I'm not!

#134 ("Silent Night,...") eliminates "Son" & "Lord": the holy infant is "tender & mild," but not male. And the therapeutic shock of the powerless infant being our powerful Lord, whom we are to obey, is lost. Also lost is God the Father (implicit in "Son"), whom the infant grew up to pray to, & to teach us to pray to. Without this implicit "Father," what you have is a self-conceiving "virgin" (biologically, like an earthworm): Jesus' conception parthenogenetic, as is much of current "women's theology" & "womanchurch." I'm being accurate, not cute. And I doubt that the bowdlerizers of NCH had enough theological sophistication to update the traditional hymns/carols without unconscious elephantine tromping on biblical truths & ecumenical-orthodox theology. (The tromping has its destructive effects even though the singers may not be sophisticated enough to realize what's happening to them--indeed, especially if they are unaware.) (Even if some of the revisers were biblically-theologically sophisticated, the censorship no-no list was too severe to permit honorable dealing with hymn-texts old & new.)

#135 ("O Come, All You Faithful") is unfaithful to the grand old carol. A dozen times in the four-stanzas refrain we are asked to adore "him," & the bowdlerized text reduces this to zero (as well as not asking us to "Come and behold *him*"). And of course the revision is ashamed of "King" & "Father": both are dropped. (So the rich Johannine-theological "Word of the Father" disappears.)

#139 ("The First Nowell") has the "magi...sages" (original, both places, "wise men") to avoid the dirty word "men." They were looking for a "king," but in the revision--unlike the original--they don't find one: "the King of Israel" washes out to the pale "born in a manger." The original carols are uplifting, their revisions in NCH depressing.

#144 ("Hark! The Herald Angels Sing") has no "new-born King" ("King" dropped all four times) & not even "Prince of peace," historically embedded phrase in the Eng. language. The address to the "nations" is shrivelled down to "saints," for fear of the evangelistic mission as cultural imperialism. Jesus is not "man," & the 5 reff. to his gender are dropped.

#145 ("Once in Royal David's City") drops Jesus' ascension, drops (2x) calling him "Lord," drops (8x) pronominal reff. to his gender....Cumulative-effect conclusion from this glimpse at just a few Christmas carols: The NCH is a shameful **disaster**.