

an open letter to Roger Shinn,
chiefly on **inclusive language**,
in response to his *CONFESSING OUR FAITH: An Interpretation
of the Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ*
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MR. BOWDLER RIDES AGAIN:

CAN A SEX OPERATION CREATE A **GENERIC DEITY**?

Dear Roger:

This commentary on your splendid Christian primer, which itself is a commentary on our splendid UCC Statement of Faith, will touch upon little in the book, since for most of it I have nothing but praise & would be embarrassed by asking you to read that, according to me, you have almost entirely the Right Stuff, a creative marriage of classical Christianity & modern sensibility. Accordingly, I'll attend almost exclusively to the points at which you worry me.... But first I must express regret that the book nowhere identifies you as the primary author of SF ("The officers, working primarily on the basis of one of these statements," p.23). Not that this datum should have been in your text: it should have been in the final paragraph of cover-p.4, the note on the author. Readers have a right & a need to know just who this is who is asking them to give time to what.

As to the format of this open letter, it will come as no surprise to you. It's decades ago that you advised me to stick with my Thinksheet style!

1 You & I agree on the antibowdler principle, that it's both a moral flaw (viz, dishonesty) & an intellectual sin (viz, deliberate textual distortion) to change texts & quotations in the interest of changing tastes & sensitivities. Furthermore, the sapiential sanction is against it: those who so mess with the word get laughed at, as in the case of poor old Mr. Bowdler, whose expurgated Shakespeare never saw a second edition. Since radical feminism is currently the chief temptation to bowdlerization, I'm glad it's a woman you quote, Phyllis Bird ("Translating Sexist Language as a Theological and Cultural Problem," USQR 42:1-2 [1988], pp.89-95; your n. on your p.40: "I agree with the biblical scholar P... B... that translators should aim for historical accuracy rather than for revision of the original texts in the light of postbiblical sensitivities. The task of interpretation remains ours.").

2 But on the same p. on which you quote PB, you leave open the question "Can the church avoid or revise the Lord's Prayer? Some worshiping communities are doing so, and others regard such acts as near blasphemies." I worry because here & at many other places in your book you let the strong superfeminist winds blowing on you compromise the antibowdler principle you claim to abide by.

You'll find that this charge is implicit in much of my commentary.

3 So far, so far as I know, sex operations have been sex transfers in one direction or the other. Have you heard of any surgery case creating a hermaphrodite? I've heard of only one, & that metaphoric: not by his own choice, God is having a vagina added, so as to be Goddess as well as God. Another school of theo-surgeons is--at the same time!--moving in the opposite direction, viz not adding but subtracting. They are neutering God, to the end that God be neither masculine nor feminine but rather either impersonal or (is this different?) sexless-personal. (Our genus contains nothing called a "person," but only males, females, & freaks. Though "people" have hair & skin, "persons" do not. Eg, Loree & I have a "mailwoman," not a "mailperson." But I don't object to the abstraction "person" in legalese, eg "Any persons trespassing....") I'm not being cutesy or facetious. The games currently going on in Amer-English make me feel like an alien resident in my own Muttersprache.... God came to us not as a person but with hair & skin, & it is with hair & skin that we stand in the presence of God & of one another as women & men, boys & (if the word is not sexist!) girls.

4 While I'm operating not on God but on language, some comments on "generic," the nodal word in this Thinksheet's title:

(1) Our UCC health insurance supplies drugs "generic when possible," otherwise brand-name (which is always more expensive, as MadAvenue must be paid). Pascal's "god of the philosophers" is generic, paying with bloodlessness for the advantage of avoiding the scandal of particularity. I've just come from a conference in which the going holophrase for God was "That Which Confronts Us & We Confront." None of the Bible's bold & playful, hair-&-skin particularity there! Many modern forces are pressing to **reshape God** into an offenseless & manageable & digestible deity, as a pelican throws the fish into the air till it come down gulpably. One of these forces is radical feminism, whose god/dess is often scarcely recognizable as a relative of the biblical God.

God has given us the power of abstract thought, so it would be wrong not to construct a "god of the philosophers." You & I believe that clergy should have good philosophical training & maintain a lifelong interest in philosophy (as well as theology, art, & science). But we also believe that Christianity is a quite concrete historical religion with its own rich metaphoric worldpicture: it is unconvertible into generic religion, religion in general, without reducing it to philosophy. A corollary you may or may not agree with is that raids made with the intention of lessening the metaphoric richness (eg, the masculinity of the biblical God) weaken the religion. (In considering the possibility of discontinuing the use of "Father" & "Son," you disagree with my corollary--you imply that it would not weaken our religion, but possibly even strengthen it. If this is your position, the history of religions in against you.)

The world-faith-ers are having a good season, riding the wave of economic (post-communist, pro-capitalist) & cultural (including "new age" & ecological) globalism--all of which seems to favor generic religion, a generic deity. But the contrary world-tendencies today are neo-nationalisms & multiculturalism--which lend support to religious specificity, even spiritual enclavism.

(2) "Generic" can mean also syncretistic, as a generic wine whose content cannot be more than half of any one wine (v. "varietal"). There is now abroad in the land a mix-&-pour-your-own-drink attitude toward religion; anything goes as long as it suits your taste, & your taste cannot be heretical ("de gustibus,..."). To this mentality, the very thought of heresy is heretical, as I've been told on more than one occasion when I've cried out "Heresy!" (Heresy-hunting, discerning the spirits, is implicit not only in ordination but also in baptism.)

(3) And of course "generic" in linguistics designates terms transcending the sexual divide, words that are of our whole human "genus" (though the bio-word is "species"). It's easy to do, & my personal practice is to avoid the English generic personal pronouns "he"--"him" & the pronominal adjective "his." Also the generic articular "a man."

But the generic anarthrous "man" is another matter. The context of this trope is always either God-&-man (as Wm. Temple's NATURE, MAN AND GOD) or God-&-nature (as in all television nature-programming). None of the synonyms work; they fail from lack of elegance &/or generality (ie, they have connotations disturbing clear-clean species-naming of "homo sapiens," our species under God & face-to-face with our fellow-creatures). Language is conservative, & the tide in English-language countries is running against dropping "man" in these two contexts. Those who insist on this dropping in their personal usage & in their literary bowdlerizations will seem queer to the general public, as does our national UCC office in Cleveland in its current Amerind-supersensitive attack on Cleveland's baseball pride, "the Indians."

5 I object to your subtitle's obscuration of the fact that UCC has Statements of Faith, not "the Statement of Faith." You indicate on pp.xi-xiii that the original (1959; not your "original version," for it wasn't a version of anything) was Synod-"approved"; Bob Moss' revision (1977) was Synod-"recommended for use" by churches (not, as you lamely say, "recommended for use by the...Synod"); & the 1981 revision (wrongly called "A Doxology": it's a prayer with a one-line concluding doxology) was Synod-"affirmed." As the text for your commentary you chose the only one eliminating all these: "Father" (therefore also implicitly Jesus'

unique Sonship), the two references to Jesus as "Lord," and the "kingdom" of God. Please be patient with me while I work through what I consider your errors in all this.

6 You err in calling this prayer--doxology a "statement of faith," let alone "the statement of faith." A statement of faith is made by the church to the church & to the world: what sense does it make to "state" our faith to God? This was an easy error for Synod to let itself be seduced into, for our church had become familiar with & practiced in shifting from the third to the second person, from "he"--"his"--"him" to "you"--"yours"--"you," to avoid the masculine generic.

Too, the original intention was for the church to make a statement of faith to itself & to the world. Is it sufficient that this so-called "doxological version" does this indirectly? I think not. I think it fails the test of original intention, the motive behind our whole statement-of-faith tradition known better to you than to any other living soul. (So I was more shocked at your accepting this shift than I would have been at anyone else's accepting it.)

You may consider this a quibble from language-purist Willis. Obviously, I consider it a distortion from a good scholar's going soft in excessive concession to feminist consciousness-raising.

7 Was the fundamental motive for the "doxological version" the desire to increase devotion in the UCC? Hardly! It was to **emasculate**, de-masculinize, the original SF--which too was Bob Moss' motive in his 1977 revision. (IRONY: Robt. Bly is trying to re-masculinize men while some theologians are trying to do the reverse to God. Our culture's been doing a better job of feminizing boys than of masculinizing them, with the result that they can't stand up to women: are we now going to so feminize God that he can't stand up to the Goddess now gaining strength in our culture & even in our church?)

Yes yes yes, the rhetoric informs us that reducing masculine references to God will not reduce God's masculinity but will provide opening for "bringing out God's feminine side." But can anyone listening to / reading feminist expositions really believe the rhetoric?

Rather, what's developed among us in UCC & other mainline-sideline churches is a PC (politically correct) **taboo** against any masculine reference to God (even those appearing in the New RSV). I hear clergy tortuously, barbarously emasculating the Sunday lections & observe pewsitters smiling at this ridiculous performance. But I prefer this abject failure to the clergy's success in reading bowdlerized Scripture such as the Inclusive Language Lectionary: the Scripture-distorting performance should fail, & it troubles me when it doesn't.

8 Judged in the light of Scripture & tradition, the original SF was not excessively masculine. It would be childish to consider God male (as, eg, Mormonism does), but the Bible reader cannot avoid the fact that he's through-&-through masculine, even to being incarnated not as a couple parallel with "in-his-image" Adam & Eve (which Sun Moon says should have been the case) but as a male. (The male incarnation compounds the masculine scandal of particularity.)

In my opinion, it's pathetic to think that any church can fly against Bible, tradition, & virtually all the churches now in the world without painting itself into a cultic feminist corner. I pray that the UCC will soon get off this kick, but I'm not hopeful: as you say in a recent CHRISTIAN CENTURY article,* our church rushes to beat the trends & make pronouncements thereon. * 24-31 July 91

9 Maybe I just passed up a good ending for this sermon! But I fear it wouldn't be fair to forego spelling out my complaint about emasculation. Let's look first at Moss' demasculinizings. God is not (as in the original SF) "Father of our Lord" Jesus Christ or "our Father" (but Jesus has become "our brother," & once later he's "Lord"). God is no longer seven times "he"--nor even once! "Man" becomes the bulky "humankind," which is no longer in "his own image." God no longer sets before "him" ("man") the ways of life & death, but before "us." (What about "them"? "They" were included in "man": are they included in "us"? Hardly, for "us" is the "we" of "we believe..." & not all humanity believes as we do. "His righteous will" becomes "that righteous will," which is less personal. "Reconciling the world to himself" becomes "reconciling the whole creation to its Creator," both

a sad restriction of God to one function, and again less personal; further, "the world" & "creation" are not theological equivalents. The personal "his Holy Spirit" becomes the impersonal "the Holy Spirit," & the personal "his church" becomes the impersonal "the church." The personal "his servants" becomes merely "servants." Trusting "him" (God) is reduced to trusting "in the gospel." "His presence" becomes the less warm "the presence of the Holy Spirit." And the personal "his kingdom" becomes "that kingdom." In the doxological line, the personal "him" becomes the cooler "God." And atop all this, the anaphoric force of all the "he"s & "his"s, hanging on the particular god described in the SF's initial line, is lost. But the rich depths & reverberations in the original introduction's "Father" (with implied special "Son") & "Lord" have already been lost! Give Moss an "A" for effort & "D" for result, which is a theological & emotional travesty on the original SF. His terminal illness & prior prominence gave his work a higher flotation than it inherently deserves.

10 You rightly put Moss' version (p.xiii) after the original (p.xii), but why do you break chronological order by putting the 1981 revision ahead of the pack (p.xi)? (You whose chronological structure overwhelmed your three rivals' trinitarian structure, in the original [Paul F. Mehl, CLASSIC CHRISTIAN CREEDS, UCP/64, p.118]!) Obviously you do it because you intend to give an exposition not of "the [original] SF" (as your subtitle seems to claim) but the SF "rewritten in the form of a prayer" (p.122 of an earlier incarnation of your present book, viz you & Dan Williams' WE BELIEVE: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE UNITED CHURCH STATEMENT OF FAITH, UCP/66, henceforth "WB," as your writing in your [et al] GREAT PHRASES OF THE CHRISTIAN LANGUAGE: A DEVOTIONAL BOOK, UCP/58, is henceforth "GP").

Recognizing that this so-called doxological revision is a redaction of Moss, I can't begin with much hope for it. It goes Moss one better--rather, worse--by eliminating *both* of the original's uses of "Lord" (though it does allow Jesus twice as "Savior"). Curiously, it makes explicit our "brother"hood with Jesus, a relationship implicit in the SF's "Father of our LJX & our Father."....In WB.16 you say, "Sometimes a word is a deed." Well, it's a deed to add "in you, O" to the original to make "We believe in you, O God" out of "We believe in God." Yes, I've previously remarked this conversion of "statement" into prayer, but here I want to be more specific in my objection. In many places you are explicit about the SF's genre. It is (as the UCC Basis of Union, & you repeatedly, say) "a [horizontal] testimony," a witness of our church to itself, to the other churches, & to the world. It's not a vertical address, ie a prayer. If it's lamely argued that it's a testimony-witness in the form of prayer, I must counter that the NT takes a dim view of praying in public so others may observe your piety. The whole concept is theologically as well as literarily false, an inauthentic miscegenation of genre. Further, the devotional tone a true prayer sustains is not sustained in this pseudo-prayer, which instead betrays itself (as do many so-called "pastoral prayers"!) as something other than prayer. (Eg, WB.16.) Why am I coming down hard on you here? Because more than anyone else, you should have objected to this (maybe you did?). You are that "tall, intense young man" whose voice proved loudest in the shaping of the original SF as you "read slowly from a single page of his own handwriting" (Mehl.114), the most dramatic moment in the SF process. It was your work more than anyone else's that was to be bastardized from a "testimony" into a pseudo-prayer....Finally, this revision worsens Moss in the last line, the doxology, by reducing "that kingdom" (already reduced from "his kingdom") to "realm," which bring me to my next §:

11 I remember hearing Shailer Mathews describe theology as "transcendentalized politics." The particular politics of "reign" & "realm" is the same as that of "kingdom," viz **monarchy**. Various suggestions have been made to transpose biblical political terms from the monarchic to the democractic, but they all fail because they direct attention not to the referent (God's sovereignty) but to the analog, the metaphor! Accordingly, those who object to "the kingdom of God" on the ground that "we don't live in a monarchy" are offering unwittingly a bogus argument. The real motive for drawing a bead against "the kingdom of God" is

antisexism. But here there's an additional bogus element. Presumably, the political metaphor under the Goddess would be "the queendom...." Goddess is the antonym of God, so why isn't queendom the antonym of kingdom? Well, just because it ain't, that's why. QE II is queen over the UK (United Kingdom), not the UQ (united queendom; though "queenship" is a word referring [OED] to a queen's dignity &/or personality). If it be further pressed that "king" gives "kingdom" a sexist pollution, does not "man" give "woman" the same (so radical feminists-womanists spell "womyn"!)). In all this we're into a nutty space, but respect for the stronger sex (erstwhile the weaker sex), + general politesse, should prevent our smiling, not to say laughing, at the farce. Compassion, too: some of our (ie, Christian) women are really hurting over this language thing, & few have gotten to Betty Actemeier's place where they can laugh about it & point to the fact that of the world's great religions ours is the least "victimizing" of women (least "oppressive," "chauvinist," "androcentric"--which fact, however, does not excuse us from the struggle for equal justice for women).

To come at it the other way 'round, would a "dynamic equivalency" rendering into democratese be accurate? God is not the elected "president" of the universe or even of the earth; his sovereignty is another dynamic, ergo no equivalency. As the other UCC (UC of Canada) SF has it, "We live in God's world." He owns the place "& the fulness thereof," he runs the place, & his glory he does not "give to another." He's the "Lord" (I'm anticipating my treatment of this word) of the feudal manor, & his fiefdom is the universe. Instead of trying to knock "kingdom" in the head, we should be sophisticating our folk to metaphor in general & biblical poetics in particular. The collapse of our liberal-church Sunday schools (& Christian education generally) makes this intellectual-spiritual formation more difficult; the world's words have hair & skin, our church language is ghostly, (in the secular negative comic sense) "theological." The big trouble for our folk is not the need for inclusive language, it's theism itself. And (tougher yet!) the atonement (vulgarly put, why the Cross if God isn't mad at us but instead loves us with "unconditional love"?).

In my daily Hebrew reading today I came upon this: "Blessed [be the] name [of] his glorious kingdom [lit., "glory kingdom-his"]...." In both your books on our SF you observe that the concluding doxology is from Handel's "The Messiah," though the words association is thoroughly biblical (as eg in the conclusion of Matthew's Lord's Prayer, 6.14 NRSV fn.). Devotionally, liturgically, & ecumenically, it's unwise if not also stupid to try to replace one (viz, "kingdom") of the series of words so closely associated in our Lord's mind & heart (on which see below)....Further, note the force of "name" in the familiar Hebrew phrase I've Englished here, as you yourself have treated it in the first chapter of GP, "To Magnify His [sic] Holy Name." In the Bible, "King" is more than a title of God, it participates in the Hebraic sense in God's "name." Which brings me to a point I've made a thousand times as one point of light: To the extent that we change the biblical language instead of acclimatizing our folk to it in the Berger-Luckmann "language-world" sense, to that extent we are alienating them from Scripture (which becomes an even more distant book from them than it is now) & thus also from the Christian religion. What of those in whom the biblical-Christian language does not "take"? They are worthless to the maintenance & spread of our religion. (You well say [WB.15], "A belief that is unsaid is incomplete, and a belief that is well said becomes a power for life and action.")

CRITICAL NOTE on your use of Moffatt's NT: (1) His last revision was 1934 ("I mean it to be final"), not 1935....(2) You do not remark that M. uses "kingdom" freq. when the context is noncommittal (as are the Hebrew & Greek words) as to "reign"--"rule" (the kingly exercise of power) or "realm" (the territory-people over which the monarch exercises primary power). His tr. of M.10.14f shows his motive: "the Realm [territory] of God belongs to" children..."whoever will not submit to the Reign [rule] of God like a child...." In addition, he had no intention that the wordings of his 1922 translation (a year before Goodspeed's) interfere (as does the Inclusive Language Lectionary) with liturgical usage. You imply that his freedom with "kingdom" gives license for its elimination, an idea that would have shocked him....(3) You are incorrect in

stating that he "used 'realm' or 'reign' instead of 'kingdom' throughout the Gospels." Rather, his normal usage in the Gss. is "Realm" and "Reign," the capitalization tipping off the readers to these as technical terms. The exceptions are instructive: In Mt.12.25f & parallels (M.3.24bis, L.11.14f), "realm" is generic &, in the case of Satan, specific (also specific in the case of Herod, M.6.25)--but in the Mt. context, v.28, the capitalization obtains for the "Reign of God." Another generic: "realm against realm" (Mt.24.7 & parallels: M.13.8, L.22.10). "To reign" (Mt.16.28). "The case is" (Mt.25.14). "The realm prepared for you" (Mt.25.34). Mark has (1.14fbis) "God's reign." Luke has (1.33bis, vb. & n.) David's "reign"; "royal power" (19.12,15, 22.23 [Jesus]); Jesus comes "to reign" (23.42). John (18.36bis) has Jesus say "my realm."....M. has "kingdom" twice in Ps.145.13, which you refer to on p.110 of COF (without ref. to M.'s tr.) as a precursor of "kingdom" in the Lord's Prayer. M. makes a further distinction in the other scripture you refer to on that p., viz Rev.11.15: The "rule" (exercise of power) over the world is now in the hands of "our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign [have authority] forever and ever."

12 I used WB, the predecessor of COF (as you say on p.x of the latter), as a Christian primer, a mini-systematic theology. COF serves the same purpose, but it's strongly & excessively bent by the feminist wind. Old radical that you remember me to be, I'm not arguing against bending with the wind but rather against being laid low by it, as so many of our trees recently were by Hurricane Bob here on Cape Cod. In my own speaking & writing I'm, within the limits I'm here expounding, gender-inclusive. Nor am I against inclusivizing hymns, as I did for a number of NYTheol.Seminary commencements (so long as "altered" appears in print, so eg Isaac Watts can be seen here to be modernized). But when it comes to what I may call Basic Biblical (pace "Basic English"), I must stand against the wind....In Zink's paraphrased NT this morning, I came across the Ro.16.17 warning against eroders of the Christian language's fundamental ideas as conveyed in our teaching-speech ("didache"): *die Grundgedanken des Glaubens*. It's only here that you & I differ in the present logomachy: you remain open to dropping, from Basic Biblical, some words I consider essential to didache, to the transmission of the Christian Faith.

13 "Father,....your kingdom come." Both these words are in the Basic Biblical vocabulary. Archaic? Of course, but so is, for most Americans with public-school inner formation, "God." (Aside: The more we hear of Goddess religion, & we're about to hear a lot more of it, the more "God" will be felt to be not generic but masculine right along with "Father," "King(dom)," "Lord," "Son.") If the Faith is to survive "on the earth," Christian education must be (as it is almost everywhere in Christendom) archaizing in the sense of teaching a Grundsprache, an audio way of signaling the basics, that is archaic except in "church" (ie in Christian intracommunal conversation), where it is Basic. (To a friend of mine, Swedish is a dead language except for the fact that it's what's spoken, what he speaks, in church.) Extracommunal Christian communication, conveying the gospel to the world, is a related but separate issue. Every in-group (say, geneticists) wanting to communicate with the general public must struggle to produce a speech bridge constructed from both sides--the audio dimension of evangelism. (A special case of this speech bridging is Hospice: Loree is the chaplain of Hospice of Cape Cod, & we've just come from a national gathering on Hospice & spirituality, where much attention was given to speech bridging.)

To many in our liberal churches, the very idea of a proprietary language, an in-family mode of speaking, is repulsive. They imagine the impossible, viz that the normal language of "the world" can, with very small adjustments, serve also as church language. But the principle of τὰ ἅγια τοῖς ἁγίοις, "the holies [things, elements, words] for the holies [church folk, "saints"]," applies here. We Christians have an irreducible lexicon, & it's now feministically threatened with radical erosion. You rightly say (COF,42) "the church is struggling to find a fitting language." I'm appealing to you, powerful voice that you are among us, to become less soft than you now are on Basic Biblical.

14 The feminist attack on Basic Biblical makes much of the masculine bias in the Germanic languages, including English. NRSV rightly makes corrections for this. But 99+% of languages yesterday & today differ only in the degree of masculine bias. (Some folks, Lionel Tiger, eg, say that's because the boys invented language with little help from the girls, but I won't touch that one--at least not here. Except to say that the androgens do put a harder drive than do the estrogens on human capacities, including speech--so there may be a biological wall against eliminating languages' masculine bias; in which case "bent" would be a better word than "bias.")

If we believe in the mutual superiority (& therefore equality) of the sexes, as I resoundingly do, most of the Germanic generics must go: pronouns, pronominal adjectives, & "man" (except in the man/God & man/nature contexts).

15 But what about the biblical (Hebrew-Aramaic-Greek) generics? In those languages & Latin (the West's formative language), "Father" is as generic for parent as "kingdom" is for rule-reign-realm-authority-power-governing-government-state. Here, in canonical hermeneutics, we're talking not translation but our Lord's own language mold-mode-mood, nowhere more available to us (despite "the Jesus Seminar"!) than in the Lord's Prayer, both versions of which enshrine both "Father" & "kingdom." Jesus instructs us how to address God, commune with one another, & witness to the world. Why, then, do you leave open (COF, 40) the question "Can the church avoid or revise the Lord's Prayer? Some worshipping communities are doing so...."? Why are you not resisting (to adapt a Jas. Madison phrase vis-a-vis democracy) "the gradual and [?] silent encroachments" on classical Christianity through this latest attack on its speech?

16 You say (p.39) that "Father" got dumped from SF '77 & '81 "to correct a bias, the representation of God as male." Only the Mormons see that representation of God in "Father": all others in the biblical tradition, Jews & Christians, have seen & now see "Father" as masculine but not male. If with radical feminists you blur that distinction, you've allowed yourself to be taken over by a naive illusion. You continue: "When we use personal language of God,...we need to avoid ascribing a gender to God." Quite a project, sir! Since English's only nonsexual pronoun is "it," following your rule inevitably adds to the cultural pressures depersonalizing God. (Further, I point to the inelegance & unclarity of that sentence. The second reference to God calls for an anaphoric; repeating the word "God" is nonanaphoric; the normal anaphoric here would be "him."....When I hear a Psalm read by an inclusive-language convert, I count the "God"dings, the hammer-blow-like repetitions of "God" to avoid the anaphorics. In addition to being ugly & confusing, it's distracting. Ditto in inclusivistic preaching & teaching.)....You continue: "The biblical symbols [for God] are usually masculine, sometimes feminine." The only example you give of the latter is not a metaphor (as "Father" is) but only a simile (Is.42.14: "I will cry out *like* a woman in travail.") Of course "female images of God are as valid as male images," but they are extremely rare. Of course they should be exploited for bridging to women's-justice issues; but what is the evidence that "the church...often suppressed [the female images] in the past?" Suppression is active, a radical-feminist false accusation; neglect is passive, & of course it often happens that a contemporary issue heightens Christians' awareness of something we've not observed, & in this limited sense neglected, in the past. It's neither scholarly nor pious of you to let your writing be infiltrated by radical-feminist rhetoric. Justice can no more be served at the expense of truth than at the expense of love.

Next p.: You & I agree with Jeremiah that "in *Abba*, we have the exact language, the *ipsissima vox*," of Jesus, & that "Jesus was an innovator in this respect." Without abandoning the political metaphor "King(dom)," far more common in the Judaism of his time, he shifted to the domestic-warm metaphor "Father." Indeed, in no other respect was he as clearly an innovator--so much so that when I told him* some churches were ceasing to use "Father," his response was "When did they decide to give up the Christian religion?" As for the notion that "ancient Oriental usage" was somewhat generically inclusive, "Father" including "Mother," that was

no more so then than it's been in the churches through the centuries & is today. Besides, that's precisely what feminists object to in the use of "man" generically, to be inclusive, is to include "women" (the generic phenomenon being the first form of inclusive language)!....The NT shows that certain Aramaic sounds of Jesus were too precious to forget (Papias' "we remember his words"): if we are faithful to the earliest church, to the NT, indeed to Jesus, we'll not forget Abba-Pater-Father (nor even the earliest church's most common way of referring to Jesus (also in Aramaic), Maran-Lord (1Cor.16.22; regularly used in the Lord's Supper, Didache 10.6 [though 8.6 has, in the Lord's Prayer, only Pater, not Abba-Pater])).

I am astonished, in light of all this, that instead of presenting balancing arguments, you would join the anti-Father party. Eg, you trot out Freud on Oedipalism without mentioning how his principle of compensation applies, viz that a perfect heaven-Father compensates for an imperfect earth-Father (his notion of the divine as illusional projection striking both sides equally & thus being irrelevant to the argument in point). Again, "For women it may represent male authority." So? What happens to the family, to society, indeed to women, without male authority? The social paradigm of male/female authority is slowly shifting from the mathematical model of equality & the political-economic model of partnership to a nuanced, maturer picture of the interplay of female & male powers-responsibilities. How ironic if "Father" were to get dumped just when we need it most! (Whatever became of simple-minded laissez faire "Christian economics"?). As for movements, they come & go as all things are being shaken "so that what cannot be shaken may remain" (Heb.12.27). I've no doubt that in the world church, "Father" is among the unshakables, but I worry about you & the UCC. And to try to warm up "Abba" as replacement would have no more success than "shalom" as replacement for "peace" (which fails to represent the range & richness of "shalom").

I adduce one further argument, one I hope you'll do more than smile at, for retaining "Father." In the media & public education, "Mother Nature" is increasingly the all-purpose holophrase for the divine. Subtly & largely unconsciously, "Mother Nature" is supportive of the androphobic-andromisic Goddess, who teaches that the Bible (masc.) is against nature (fem.) & thus against ecology & thus for the macho overdevelopment of the planet & therefore for biocide. Opposing the Father God is the Goddess, Mother Nature, who's for sustainability &--yes--shalom. Some of us sense that the fight against Her will be the next great Christian theological task. (Am I being gynophobic-gynomisic? No way! I love women, do not fear & hate them. And I agree that about a billion of them have a rum deal with men who are not really men.)

As for the Trinity, you know the inadequacy & even heresy of all attempts toward a formula eliminating "Father" & "Son." ("Son" is implicit in the "Father" in the original SF, though you & Roger Hazelton wanted to make it explicit; & of course "Son" appears in neither version of the SF. As for our UCC Book of Worship, Tom Dipko told me that only the ecumenical rejection of any baptism lacking "Father" & "Son" kept those words in! The committee voted them out, then reversed when this ecumenical fact was adduced. Our '81 Synod asked that the revised SF be "theologically sound and inclusive," but the committee put little weight on the former.)

17 I'll make "Lord" short, as I've already said much pertinent to it. In WB,13 you show how important it is, along with "Christ" & "Son." But in your COF chapter "God Comes to Us in Christ," you never use "Lord"! You accept another word of very different bearing, viz "Savior," in its place. In wanting to be "responsive" to the present, are you not failing to be "sensitive to the Christian heritage" (p.12)? Yet you worry that UCC "may become a 'sect'" (p.31) instead of remaining within classical Christianity & the Christian ecumene.

Without "Lord," the church would lose one of the roots of the Trinity, viz the earliest Christian Bible's YHWH-Jesus Κύριος Kyrios. On p.9 you say "the Christ (meaning 'Messiah' or 'Lord')." But you must know how pale & powerless "Christ" is articulary ("the Christ") in comparison with God's Name YHWH applied to Jesus by those who used our first Bible (Greek OT as well as NT). Used anar-

thrusly, as the name "Christ," the word has the clarity of pointing to the historical Jesus, the purity of signaling his transcendence, & the power of indicating his authority--but still it's a Hebrew word that can't carry the full weight & range (all the way up to the Emperor!) of "Lord" in the lingua franca, Greek, of the Mediterranean world that was the language-womb of our Faith. It's wrong to imply, as you do, that "Christ" might cover "Lord" & thus mollify at this point the radical-feminist objection. I quote you your own warning (pp.92f): "Perhaps the most common response of 'the powers of evil'...is not to oppose the Christian message but to seduce or corrupt it. People...change [the gospel] into an ideology supporting their partisan interests....Christians who tell the good news of Christ must resist the powers of evil that operate at large and that tempt them from within." I'm far more concerned with radical feminism's tempting from within the church than I am about it's operating at large. I accuse you of yielding to its seduction; letting it in you corrupt Basic Biblical by emasculation.

18 If I don't quit, I'll have to pay more than 29¢ postage for this self-mailer. Anyway, it's time for me to put up or shut up, in fact both. I'm putting up, in concluding this letter to you, by essaying a revision of SF. Bf are variations from the original Statement of Faith.

We testify to these the deeds of God, the Eternal Spirit, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father, who

calls the worlds into being,
creates man in his own image,
and sets before him the ways of life and death.

He seeks in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin,
judging men and nations by his righteous will
declared through prophets and apostles.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Lord,
God has come to us,
sharing our common lot,
conquering sin and death,
reconciling the world to himself.

Through the divine bestowal of the Holy Spirit,
faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races
are bound in covenant,
the church of Jesus Christ **is created and renewed.**

God calls us into the church
to accept the cost and joy of discipleship,
to be his servants **in caring for humanity and the good earth,**
to proclaim the gospel to all the world
and resist the powers of evil,
to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table,
to join him in his passion and victory.

God promises to all who trust him
forgiveness of sins and ful(l)ness of grace,
courage in the struggle for justice and peace,
his presence in trial and rejoicing,
and eternal life in his kingdom which has no end.

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto him! Amen.

Grace and peace,

