

NOT ALL CLOSET THEISTS ARE HOMOSEXUALS,
NOT ALL UNIVERSAL PRECAUTIONS ARE ABOUT AIDS, &
NOT ALL INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IS ABOUT GENDER

2333 15 June 89

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

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

Phone 508.775.8008

Noncommercial reproduction permitted

This Thinksheet muses about **second-level** **adjectivitis**. The first level of the disease is merely a speaker-writer's tendency to overuse adjectivies, which lack either the precision of nouns or the energy of verbs; the second level is jargon, the adjective + its noun flagging some political or professional area of rhetoric, concern, or praxis....Let's have a blick as the three adjectives in our title:

CLOSET as a noun is a place for hanging clothes, or for praying (KJV Mt.6⁶: "when thou prayest, enter into thy closet") in secret. As an adj. it appeared (RHD² says "1965-70") as "closet queen," a homosexual who's not gone public, ie is not "out of the closet." A few days ago a functionary of the Republican National Committee released a four-page hoping to smear the new (Demo) Speaker of the House by calling him a "closet liberal," a phrase reeking of sex-orientation innuendo both in its adjective & in its subtle reference to a certain gay Representative--& scurrilous also in its noun, for that gay Representative is far to the left of the new Speaker....Well, before "closet" gained its homosexual connotation by being taken up into the gay lexicon, it meant simply hidden, out of public view. That's the innocent denotatum in my phrase **closet theist**: a God-believer who conceals the belief by never mentioning God.....Story: Yesterday, after an ethics panel at Cape Cod Hospital, I asked ethicist Dan McCullough why his excellent essays, which I encouraged him to have published in book form, are atheist. "I believe in God," he replied, "but don't mention him, for fear I might offend someone." "You offend me," I retorted, "when you don't mention God!" Startled, he said "I think God sent you to me to say that." Unwittingly, he's been part of the general American conspiracy to commit God-amnesia, the secular-media tabu against God-talk. In our public schools, Americans learn to think about everything godlessly. If applied to us, Rilke was wrong: God, left out of our stories, does not come in after the period at the end of the last sentence, even though our cultural & national origins are God-pervaded.

UNIVERSAL, in the phrase "universal precautions," was taken by the moderator at the hospital ethics session yesterday to mean "the works--gloves, coverall, mask." A nurse corrected him: "It means everybody: everybody, on approaching a 'UP' case, must take special precautions--the precautions depending on the case." While theoretically broader, "UP" in that hospital is limited to AIDS cases. We wrestled with the euphemistic dimension of the medical jargon in that (ugh!) venue.

INCLUSIVE means not leave anything/anybody out, ie not being "exclusive." That's the active form: the passive means not forbidding anybody/anything to be, or to come, in. So what does "inclusive language" mean? When you stress the noun--inclusive language--it means not leaving any linguistic expressions out. Says David Loar, a UCC pastor in Texas, "Without God the Father, our language for God would not be inclusive" (UNITED CHURCH NEWS, June/89, p.6). As a Christian linguist, daily reading Scripture in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, & a modern tongue other than English, I have a deep & prayerful commitment to this meaning of "inclusive language." Daily I observe, in reading my fellow Christians dead & alive & in between, distortions & impoverishments due to language constriction, to unwarenesses in the Faith Language (the images, ideas, sounds, idioms, axioms of Christian expression in the formative languages of what's being called of late our "faith tradition"). While I'm eager for enrichments from any source, for all enrichment is of the Spirit, I'm worried about the diluting & polluting effect of such innovations on those who are unaware of the riches we already have, as Paul saith, "in Christ." And I laugh, rage, & weep over those who for howsoever noble a reason think to deprive the Christian language of any riches in the *depositum fidei*, the treasurestore of sounds through which we join believers through the ages in the praise of God. So I'm happy when my old friend Bruce Metzger, chair of NRSV (New Revised Standard Version, coming out next year), says "We are not tampering with the gender of the deity."....When you stress the adjective--inclusive language--it means not leaving anybody out, viz females, which the generic has of late come to be thought to do, as also "patriarchalism" in heaven & on earth.