

**THE IMPURITY REACTION:** The impulse to distance oneself  
condemn

The case of **impure speech**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

In our most recent meeting, I experienced a severe impurity-reaction & believe I owe you an explanation for my narrow-mindedness in saying that if copies of The New Century Hymnal were received as a gift & placed on the Tabernacle benches, I would immediately resign from the committee. I meant this not as a petulant power-play (I despise the take-my-toys-&-go-home threat) but as a statement of inner fact: being convinced that TNCH **pollutes** Christian hymnody with an overlay of new religion, my purity impulse is to condemn & attack it & to distance myself from it, the two actions all human beings are taught vis-a-vis contamination.

"All human beings": please be patient with me as I use my outburst as occasion to expatiate on a human characteristic little remarked on in the current latitudinarian American culture.

1 Human beings vary widely in (1) what they consider impure & (2) the degree of their **revulsion** from particular perceived impurities. Take the case of **water**: Those of us in the Red Lily Pond Project care deeply about the pollution of Craigville's little lake, which is so threatened that without immediate action to the contrary it will turn into a marsh. And as for the global decline in water quality from the small mountain of feces each person of normal lifespan produces, this is humanity's greatest physical threat. I am appalled that religion, which should be promotive of human life & its support-system, is so powerful a force against certain actions (such as contraception & abortion) that somewhat reduce the rising flow of flesh (WHO's "100 billion of us" if opposing, population-stabilizing forces prove inadequate). It will take more than education: it will take reeducation of the impurity reaction. Whatever produces impure (unpotable) water is impure; feces are impure; in producing feces, humans are impure; therefore,...what? Because other values rightly intervene in this syllogizing, we can't eliminate humanity (though species come & go, & ours may not survive); but we can, & should, train humans to have a revulsion reaction against the biolatrous doctrine that since the human fetus is a creature of God, its existence should be privileged beyond all other considerations both in its inception (the zygote) & in its telos (parturition). Quoting old sacred literature in its absolute defense is an instance of failure to worship God with all our mind.

2 Or take **music**. I was so thoroughly trained against sharpening & flattening that I'm keenly aware when a singer or instrumentalist commits either of these impure sins against pure sound.

3 Or take **speech**, language. I have so much (as the Germans say) Sprachgefühl ("speech-feeling," feeling for speech in all its aspects) that I hurt when human beings abuse what may be our one clear distinction from God's other creatures: we are (as many philosophers have claimed) the language animal. Often, in public I've let others be language-"right" when I knew they were wrong, for the public can't abide word-naggers; but frequently the pressure's been too great, from my conviction that too much was at stake for me to hold my peace.

4 By empathy, I hurt when others feel hurt by speech I personally don't feel hurt by. With gender feminists I hurt when I hear/read "fellowship": "fellow" is (Ox. Eng.Dict.) a "weak masculine," but it is masculine, though it's often used generically (as a "fellow" of a college or an academic "fellowship"). Radical feminists (all of whom are gender feminists) have the impurity reaction at any generic use of masculine forms. On some forms I share the impurity reaction--e.g. I agree with NRSV when it renders the generic "men" as "men & women," with footnote to indicate generic "men" (but would not agree to the general collective priority of the feminine, viz. "women & men"). And I hurt enough to change "chairman" to "chair" but not enough to change it to "chairperson."

5 Not by empathy but directly, I hurt enough to have the impurity reaction when gender politics is verticalized to de- re-construct the biblical deity, thus sacrificing the divine pronouns ("he," "his," "him," "himself") & the central divine titles/names

("King," "Lord," "Father"). The Jews noticed that their deity had been so *reconfigured* by the Christians as to present a new religion: I noticed that the Christian deity has been so reconfigured, redesigned, by gender feminism as to constitute a new religion, "another god, *not* the Christian God" (Leslie Zeigler, Spr/96 PRISM, 14; accurately representing the great UCC NT scholar Paul Minear in his Spr/88 PRISM attack on the UCC's BOOK OF WORSHIP; she continues, "THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL reflects even more strongly the [God-language] problems to which Minear referred"). I remember my teacher Minear as a man of somewhat placid disposition, but against the UCC's official bowdlerized language for God he's had a steady impurity reaction (which now let's call by its emotional tone, **revulsion reaction**--the revulsion reaction I had, & for the same reason, in the most recent meeting of our committee).

6 In a church as theologically polychrome as the UCC, a caucus church, a fair & just hymnal will honor all the revulsions, which (positively put) means also honoring all the convictions. That is the hymnal I asked for (1) when in UNITED CHURCH NEWS I was quoted as saying, in a hymnal forum meeting prior to publication, that an honest, representative UCC hymnal would "offend everybody," & (2) when I wrote #2702 ("Guidelines for the NEXT Hymnal Committee") as the position paper for my debate with TNCH's chair, Jas. Crawford. Instead, what we got is an ideological production for "the new century," offending only one sector of the UCC membership (viz. those who aren't willing to surrender the Bible's way of talking with & about God [as "he," "Father," "Lord," "King"]) instead of fairly, justly, revulsing all. INSTANCE: The great favorite in all Protestant churches & many Catholic, "This is my Father's world," does not occur in TNCH: it offends against all the God-language taboos of the gender feminists: it has "Father," "Lord," "King," & masculine pronouns for God! In bowdlerization, it'd be unrecognizable.

7 By contrast, THE UNITED METHODIST HYMNAL (U.M. Pub. House/89) does have "This is my Father's world," completely unbawdlerized. Whereas the new UCC hymnal **never** uses masculine pronouns for God in old or new hymns, the new Methodist hymnal almost **always** retains them in the old hymns. And whereas the Psalter in the former **never** uses "Lord," the Psalter of the latter **always** does & even increases the instances (e.g. Ps.23: "The Lord is my shepherd. The Lord...."). Not surprisingly, some of our churches have in their pews not the new UCC hymnal but the new Methodist hymnal, which does not lay a feministic ideological trip on congregations & therefore has not produced the groundswell of revulsion reaction the new UCC hymnal has. To put it plainly, TUMH is what I prayed & witnessed that the new UCC hymnal would be, & isn't: a songbook fairly & justly representing the denomination's theological range of convictions. IRONY: The UCC officially parades itself as "a justice & peace church"! (The UCC hymnal committee could have learned from the Methodist hymnal, which was published six years before TNCH.)

8 This Thinksheet's using a number of metaphors to make its point against heresy by addition ("the impurity reaction," "the pollution reaction," "the contamination reaction") & heresy by subtraction ("the malnutrition reaction," "the anorexic reaction," "the loss reaction"). Covering both is an expression that's not metaphoric: **"the revulsion reaction."** Because I wanted to connect with the purity sanction, I began with "the impurity reaction" & instanced water & music. But when I got to speech, language, I faced a split: whereas gender feminists are revulsed by the canonical-catholic use of masculine titles/names & pronouns for the deity (even including, in the case of goddess-worshippers, "God"), espousing therein a form of pollution hitherto unrecognized, their opponents are revulsed by "inclusive language" Bibles, liturgies, hymnbooks, etc., because such publications betray the Christian religion by language-reduction. REVULSION is the experience common to both, as it is in abortion, in my opinion a less important matter: one side is revulsed at "baby-killers," the other at the thought of legally coerced births in violation of "a woman's freedom." (In paralleling genetic engineering, language change is more serious than ethical issues such as abortion: legislative changes are not as durable as linguistic changes.)

9 With gender feminists I share a revulsion: I'm revulsed at the teaching (as in +

Mormonism) that the deity is **sex-specific**, viz. male (or, of course, female, though that's limited to one school of goddess worshipers). The Bible's deity is **gender-specific** (masculine), but certainly not sex-specific (male). The literalism that he is male requires--but doesn't get--a literal consort, a wife; but canonical religion is revulsed at the idea that God needs a wife, a gross misunderstanding. But some, in addition to being revulsed (as I am) by the primitive notion that God is male, are so revulsed at the idea that he's masculine as to (1) refuse to use masculine titles/names/masculine pronouns for God, or even (2) try to remove all male characteristics from the biblical-masculine God (an instance of the latter being Rich.S.Williams, 103-9, said PRISM; he emasculates "virility," relationally [femininely] redefining it).

With the exception of feminist converts, biblical scholars are beginning to return to honest, spin-less (or at least less-spin) hermeneutics. Factors aiding this return are (1) a new emphasis on the biblical languages (of which the most influential Christian thinkers have been "innocent" for several generations), (2) a renewal of biblical spirituality, & (3) rebellion in the pews. And I must add (4) rising cultic competition--e.g. a Buddhist center was started on Cape Cod last week, teaching basic rituals such as the every-morning "Greeting of the Buddha" (CCT 23July96). The pluralistic premise is present in the ex-Jewish founder: "I don't see any big conflict between Judaism & Buddhism or between Christianity & Buddhism. All religions are expressions of one ultimate reality." NOTICE: While the Bible's *specific* deity is a match for this neo-pluralism, feminism's *generic* is, I'm convinced, not.

10 A note on the peril of **modernizing** classics. Can you imagine how eliminating Middle-Eng. "thees" & "thous" would rip up Shakespeare? The chair of TNCH told me that doing so proved more pesky than was at first thought. My impression is that a number of classic hymns were dropped primarily because they were too difficult to modern-Eng. bowdlerize (a sad, unnecessary bowdlerizing added to the ruthless gender-bowdlerizing that characterizes TNCH). I am doubly revulsed! (Neither atrocity is consistently committed by the new Methodist hymnal.)

11 The Apostle Paul takes seriously the revulsion reaction in his discussions of the strong/weak conscience. He teaches ritual freedom within the strictures of (1Cor.10) "do[ing] all to the glory of God" & (within gospel limits) "giv[ing]e no offense" but "pleas[ing]e" everyone." But he is adamant that (1Thes.4.7) "God did not call us to impurity [context: extramarital intercourse] but in holiness." Notice the creative ambiguity: (1) You are weak, revulsed by changing how the church speaks to & of God; so the congregation should not use TNCH; (2) You are strong, so you shouldn't take the language changes as seriously as the overall high quality of TNCH; you shouldn't be so revulsed, if your congregation adopts TNCH, as to leave the church (as some have told me they have, & as I probably would). But note the principle that God has called us "in holiness": what's the holy thing to do vis-a-vis TNCH in compliance with the divine demand "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev.19.2; cp.21.8)? What's the saintly thing to do? (Problem with "saintly": it's major connotation is "effete"! Be saintly in that sense & you'd be prejudicially compliant, never a trouble-maker, so never a martyr [a Gk. wd. whose connotation is witnessing when it hurts, as supremely in the case of Jesus].)

12 I am revulsed by weak substitutes for strong biblical words/symbols that have through the centuries inspired Christian commitment to witness & service in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in the power of his Spirit. E.g., the early Church's first confession was not the pallid "Jesus is Sovereign" (a Fr. wd. which in Eng. means merely in charge), or "Jesus is Savior" (which means deliverer), or "Jesus is the Holy One" (i.e. the One to whom devotion is due), but "Jesus is Lord" (the only Eng. wd. carrying the rich freight of history [tying the Testaments together, YHWH & Jesus], politics [in-your-face claiming over against "Lord Caesar" & other earthly potentates], & love [the intimate fellow-feeling of the master/slave, patron/client, father/child relationship at its best]). Further: besides being weak, the above substitutes misdirect attention, violating the context. In TNCH, all this occurs hundreds of times in substituting for "Lord," to that hymnal a four-letter dirty word.

The case of "Lord" is a matter of life, not just of language. Wayne A. Meeks, in THE ORIGINS OF CHRISTIAN MORALITY: THE FIRST TWO CENTURIES (Yale/93),

displays how early Christian community-formation was a word-&-deed interweave, neither the words (the Christian language) nor the deeds (Christian morality, behavior in the broad & narrow senses) being separable from the other. I note the general truth, an ethnological commonplace, that a community is unsustainable, falls apart, if either its language (its actual words in themselves & in habitual combinations) or its ritual-&-ethical behavior changes to any significant degree. Eliminating (or even repressing) such a central word as "Lord" irreparably weakens the Church's mind, memory, & hope. In Paul Ricoeur's picture, "Lord" has essential meanings both behind & in front of the text.

The official UCC's God-language here, & many other places, both depletes (by failing to convey *sensus plenior* [the full-er-est meaning] while claiming to convey *sensus plenus* [the full meaning]) & pollutes (by adding notions extraneous to the text, as e.g. [in L.2.29] awe ["the Holy One"] is substituted for submission ["Lord," correlative with the text's "servant"--a violation occurring many times in the UCC's Book of Worship & The New Century Hymnal])....NOTE that this common feministic abuse of L.2.29 not only pollutes but also depletes: the idea of submission is elided even though it's implicit in the text, elided because of feministic hatred for the submission-idea, which means that the "Lord" is **above** (a wd. frequently dropped in TNCH) & the "servant" **below**, underneath, a position insulting to the autonomous ego so prized in the present American culture & nailed by social psychiatrists as a disease.

I assure you, my fellowmembers of the Tabernacle Committee, that TNCH, in its frenzy to overlay Christianity with a new religion, often commits such egregious distortions as in this abuse of L.2.29. Anyone thinking this a small matter should think of a good organist suffering the playing of a poor one: so I suffer when the Christian language & texts are abused. A close friend of mine, a good organist, literally could not remain in an audience/congregation & continue to suffer the noise. I could not worship Sunday after Sunday anywhere with TNCH in the pews/benches. My revulsion reaction is so strong that I could not, according to my lights, be faithful to the Lord & the Church while continuing to worship in a TNCH-corrupted sanctuary. Yes, I am that narrow-minded (Mt.7.14).

13 Languages can die, become "dead [no longer spoken] languages." The Christian language is fading in the old mainline denominations, so our people no longer have a **discerning ear** for it. A society dies when its language dies: churches cannot survive the death of "the language of Zion," biblical speech. Another speech, pluralistic, is replacing biblical--e.g. in Brian Wren's "Bring Many Names" (TNCH #11), 1 of his 15 in this hymnal. (Contrast the Christian discernment of the new Methodist hymnal, which has 14 of B.W.'s hymns but not this clearly pluralistic one.)

Take a look. The hymn is not specifically Christian: never even mentions Jesus. The hymn has a preferential option for the feminine divine: the "mother God" stanza precedes the "father God" stanza, a double violation of the biblical deity, who incorporates the feminine but is never "mother God." Wren's religion here is not the Bible's monotheism but New Age's panentheism (God-in-everything), as is admitted at the bottom of the page: "The author states that aspects of the divine are revealed in our maleness, femaleness, youth and age in a moving, growing matrix of life in God." For a close parallel, read pagan Ro. Emperor Marcus Aurelius' MEDITATIONS (panentheistic, then called "Stoic"). Cp. Mt. Fox's "creation [v. redemption] spirituality": no biblical Christ, no Cross....Why did the UCC include this clearly pagan song? Surely they were aware of the truth that *lex cantori, lex credendi* (people come to believe what they sing). In not including "Bring Many Names," the Methodist hymnal exercised Christian censorship of paganism. The UCC's new hymnal censored out the biblical pronouns for God & suppressed the major titles/name for God, but didn't blink to include this pagan hymn! Such a hymnal cannot be trusted to honor our Christian & UCC past or even deal honestly with it, so cannot be trusted to lead our folk into "the new century."

14 Allergies are the **body's** revulsion reactions. Lawyer Welch devastated the dishonorable Sen. Joe McCarthy in court with the cry "Have you no decency, no shame?" **Inner**, nonphysical allergies (revulsion reactions) must be learned & can be (as they were in the case of Ro.-Cath.-educated McCarthy) unlearned, forgotten. My cry is that liberal Christianity, esp. the UCC, has unlearned the biblical sensitiv-

ivities as to the major forms of deity-address (viz., Lord, King, Father) & the only pronominal forms of deity-referencing (viz., the masculine pronouns). Two ironies here, both relative to other UCC sensitivities:

(1) Liberal Christians are allergic to fundamentalist **literalism**, yet here we have a literalism on the left: When Mary Daly attacked the biblical God as "male," an egregious literalism unsustainable in Judaism & Christianity, liberal Jews & Christians failed to counterattack, failed to accuse her of fundamentalistic literalism & defamation. Some other white women inside & (as Daly was, though formerly a R.C. nun) outside the Church took up the cry, & we are living with the wreckage. Liberal white male clergy collapsed into conformity & called themselves "feminists" (first, political feminists [for women's rights], then gender feminists [against the masculinity of the biblical deity]). Nonconformist liberal clergy, including me, were then called "sexist." The conformists, with self-righteous supercompassion, defended their conformity by saying, "Women are hurting." At first, only a few women, white women, "knew" they were hurting; then, by Saul-Alinsky-type consciousness-raising, many white women began to feel that they'd been put upon by the masculine (allegedly male) God of the Bible, Judaism, & Christianity.

(2) The second irony is that liberal Christianity's vaunted sensitivity to the plight of African-Americans is countered by the attack on the masculinity of the biblical deity, a masculinity that through the centuries has put muscle on black singing. A large all-white choir in Craigville Tabernacle "Lord's Day Worship" today (28 July 96) sang the black spiritual "The King [sic!] is coming!" Remove from the black spirituals the masculine nouns & pronouns for God & what you have left reminds of WWII military-censored letters I received: shreds. Of course the feministic virus came to infect some black women, who (to distinguish their agenda from white women's) came to call themselves "womanists."

The tragedy & farce of this insensitivity to our Faith's God-language will take long to be confessed, so deeply are liberal clergy, especially ecclesiarchs, invested in it. Penitent restoration of how the Bible speaks to and about God will be painful & slow, painfully slow. Mine is one of few prophetic voices crying out against this instance of being "conformed to this world [NRSV fn., "age"]."

15 Besides the Olympics now in process there, Atlanta has our nation's Center for Disease Control. Neither the nation nor the councils of churches (from local to global) have any center for the control of **diseased language**, language threatening cultural-spiritual health. The media's censorship-walls are crumbling, & one hears /reads increasing profanity & even blasphemy. Proper English (conscious of & conformable to the language's structure & nuances) has come to be considered over-nice & even oppressive. Liberal religion has become language-lax, defending its sloth by such absurdities as "Love is more important than language" & "The feeling-tone is more important than the words." When 56 years ago I was ordained to be (among other things) *defensor fidei*, a defender of the Faith, how could that not have included defending both how the Faith is spoken & the languages in which it is spoken? Yet I find little support for my honest-to-language & language-precision campaign. (Also, how could I have honored the Faith I was ordained to proclaim if I did not honor the first languages, the mother languages, of the Faith? And how could I have honored them without learning them? And what am I to say to those who, not knowing the Faith's mother-tongues, tell me I'm taking too seriously the way the Bible speaks to & of God?)

16 Am I too **thin-skinned** about, too sensitive to, language, esp. how God is spoken to & of? God made us human beings thin enough skinned precisely so we'd be more sensitive than our thicker-skinned fellow-creatures: thin skin is a prime survival-&-success characteristic of our species. Metaphorically, we can learn to be thin-skinned, more sensitive than the general public, to sights (we become plastic artists), sounds (we become musicians), sememes (meanings in sounds), the sacred (we become saints), etc. I am, & long have been persuaded that I'm called to be, sememe sensitive, thin-skinned about language. A person with an esp. sensitive skin is said to be touchy. You, the Craigville Tabernacle Committee, are well aware of what your chair is touchy about. Give thanks you are not my wife, who lives with it every day.



17 Today a prominent Conn. UCC pastor told me his church, in opposition to his "wanting to go along with the denomination" (& buy TNCH), voted to buy the new Presbyterian hymnal (with UCC rather than Presbyterian imprint). Said he, "Considering the cogency of your attack on TNCH, I'm not really displeased with their choice." The UCC's "Confessing Christ" plans to publish an annotated list of good hymnals alternative to TNCH. It will include the new hymnals of the Presbyterians, the Methodists, the Disciples, & two nondenominational ones. TNCH will be the only one under **absolute ideological control**: all the others will be more "liberal" in providing a wide range of hymns & permitting the use of the Bible's normal, natural way of speaking to & about God. You can be sure that no familiar great hymn will be censored out on the ground that it's God-language is too biblical (the ground on which "This is my Father's world" was excluded from TNCH). ("At the name of Jesus" [PH197] is another great hymn [with a great R. Vaughn Williams tune] excluded from TNCH as being too biblical--e.g. in the line "'Tis the Father's pleasure we should call him [Jesus] Lord.")

18 The recent Craigville Colloquy, while not directly addressing the hymnal issue, had leaders who struck tangential notes. TNCH considers itself prophetic in anticipating what Christians will be singing in "the new century," but Eugene Wehrli (the Colloquy's Bible teacher) said "The [NT, Christian] prophets are in the church leading worship, not out in the streets," & "The OT prophets call the people back to the tradition." Ecumenical observer Paul Crowe (Disciples of Christ & World Council of Churches) warned that the UCC has skewed "the prophetic" into meaning that the UCC should be "the avant-garde church," for which the price paid is too little concern to be "catholic"--TNCH, I add, illustrating both baneful characteristics of our communion. Diversity, said he, becomes division if the catholic element is taken too lightly. (TNCH prates about diversity, but its anticatholic dogma vis-a-vis language for God has made it a divisive influence in the UCC & a laughingstock in the other churches & in the secular society.)

LLIOTT THINKSHEETS  
309 Lake Elizabeth Drive  
Craigville MA 02632

