

## ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

309 L.Eliz.Dr., Craigville, MA 02636  
 Phone 508.775.8008  
 Noncommercial reproduction permitted

This hymnal committee--for THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL (1995) --was headed throughout its life by James Crawford, pastor of Old South Church in Boston, with whom I'm to have an extended (10am-4pm) public conversation the day after tomorrow (advertised as "Which Hymns Should We Be Singing Now?")....I've not seen NCH (hereafter for The New Century Hymnal), nor even a list of its hymns. My paper knowledge of it is limited to (1) its "Sampler" ('93), (2) its outline ("Organization of the Hymnal"), (3) its "Theological Guidelines" (revised 2.92), & (4) "Inclusive Guidelines for the Staff of the Ohio Conference, United Church of Christ"--which, said Crawford in a 2 Oct 94 letter to me, served the hymnal committee as "a baseline for soon intended guidelines."

My impression is that NCH is a highly competent work which will upgrade singing in many of our UCC churches. In a number of ways it's an advance on the main hymnals now in use in our churches, viz. THE EVANGELICAL AND REFORMED HYMNAL, THE PILGRIM HYMNAL, & THE UNITED CHURCH HYMNAL.

Only **indirectly** is this Thinksheet a critique of NCH. My **direct** intention is to dream, according to my lights, toward the hymnal beyond NCH. Toward that goal, & as a dialectical counter in said public conversation, here are my **GUIDELINES**:

**1 Theocentricity** As a Godward activity, worship is going on privately/publicly, personally/communally, only when God is the attentional-intentional Center. In many worships ("worship service" is a redundancy), the hymns are the chief incentive to this Godward activity. For as a bouquet compacts & intensifies a garden, so a great hymn theotropes the soul (yes, as the sun heliotropes flowers). (#2695)....Accordingly, a hymnal's organization should be intentional:

The first section, **hymns proper**. All proper hymns are, by the very meaning of the Greek word, addressed to God.\*

Second section, **apostrophes**, songs addressed elsewhere than to God, but in hymnic form. E.g., "America the Beautiful."

Third section, **liturgical songs**--neither prayers (hymns) nor apostrophes, but occasionally appropriate in worship. E.g., in our congregation's worship yesterday we sang NCH's "Won't You Let Me Be Your Servant." I liked it, though it drew attention from God to us: it's anthropocentric, though its final stanza mentions "sing[ing] to God in heaven" after we're dead. Liberal (Enlightenment-oriented) hymnals are heavily larded with such liturgical songs. Makes me nervous. "The world, the flesh, and the devil" (in Gn.3, the snake) tempt our attention to wander from God: worship is the only force yanking us back into reality. So the hymnal ought not to provide too many handles for hell to distract us from (as the Westminster Catechism puts it) "man's chief end."

\* Though not all are second-person. The one-word Hebrew hymn, "Hallelujah!" centers in God (Jah/Yah/YHWH) by indirect address, the grammatically direct address being to the worshiping congregation, as in "Crown Him with Many Crowns" (based on our earliest description of Christian worship, viz. Rev.4-5). All songs of direct (second-person) address to God are hymns: some others songs, by virtue of their intent-content, are hymns by grammatical indirection.

**STORY** on this Guideline: A few evenings ago, the hostess at a dinnerparty said, "My grandson asked me why God causes both sweet & sour food to come from the ground. I said, 'How would I know?'" I gently rebuked her: "'God' was the subject of his sentence: why wasn't it of yours?" She had not met his question even grammatically, to say nothing of content. Indeed, her response had the worst possible subject: "I," which theodynamically is the most sinful word. My continuation: "'God,' as the Bible's subject throughout indicated whom we are to be in subjection to, is the subject of the Bible's first clause, which in this models for our speaking: you should have had 'God' as the subject of the sentence in responding to your grandson." She: "But what would I have said after that?" I: "Whatever came to mind to get you all the way to the period." In beginning with "God," she'd've been TC (theologically correct), no matter how lame the rest of the sentence: in beginning otherwise, she'd've been wrong no matter how brilliant the sentiment....That's how important "hymns proper" are to hymnody, the hymnbook.

2 **Documentary integrity** (the title of #2680, which propounds & expounds the thesis that "no social movement can justify revisionistic rewritings of historical documents: facticity has priority over utility") Under Stalin, the Russian Encyclopedia was bowdlerized in the interest of RC (revolutionary correctness) & is now in process of demythologization. Radical feminism's Inclusive Language Bible will need the same treatment once this extremist blip passes off the screen of church history--unless it becomes the Bible of a new religion (with M.Daly, R.R.Reuther, & E.-S.Fiorenza among its priestesses).

In #2680 I detail four degrees of distance from, & so of violation of, documentary integrity. Here, a few notes must suffice:

(1) Considerable portions of Scripture have undergone oral, written, & redactional layerings, with successive levels of witness; but the Christian canon (1) limited the biblical literature & (2) froze the process of literary change within the canon--all of which is masterfully laid out in Brevard S. Child's 745-p. BIBLICAL THEOLOGY of the Old and New Testament (Fortress/93). In my opinion, **NRSV** honors this canonical principle, does not abuse documentary integrity, in its moderate inclusive-language guidelines (as described by my old-walking/talking-partner Bruce Metzger in every copy's "To the Reader"). E.g., in Gn.1.27, "man" has become "humankind," but God remains masculine 3x ("his/he/he"). (In #2701, I deal extensively with the question of the masculine pronominals ["he/his/him/himself"] for God: pronominals for God are never feminine & never neuter.)

(2) Ironic incident: At a recent "Confessing Christ" meeting, the documentary integrity of a text, viz. Col.1.15-20 ("adapted"), which was read in unison, was violated--in spite of the fact that "C.C." exists to affirm the inviolate bases of classical-canonical Faith! The "beloved Son" (v.13) of "the Father" (v.23) was changed to "Christ," patently to avoid Trinitarian language. Later, I became aware that the violation was reproduced from p.509 of the UCC BOOK OF WORSHIP, which is not to be trusted in such matters, as it was produced under the ideological incubus of radical-feminist inclusive-language guidelines, roughly the same ones clouding over the new UCC hymnal (NCH), which then also cannot be trusted in such matters. (The lame use of "adapted" offers little protection for the violation.).....Is it fair to call this radical (in comparison with the NRSV)? Indeed! Consider these further facts about the passage as "adapted": "Christ" is used a dozen times, though it occurs not at all in Greek/NRSV; &, though the masculine pronominals for deity occur 14x in NRSV (including "himself" for both Christ & God), they occur not at all in the "adapted" bowdlerization!

(3) Sad incident: UCC President Paul Sherry, in a Craigville Tabernacle sermon last summer, so bowdlerized some M.L.King Jr. passages that I was moved, while talking with him in my home a few days later, to say "Naughty! I'm not even sure Bro. Martin would recognize, behind what you read, what he wrote." A clear violation of documentary integrity, even without warning the congregation that the preacher had emasculated (desexized) the King material.

(4) A hymnal committee should, when crediting a hymn to its original author, limit its alterations to what does not violate the hymn's tone, its transverbal message. A subtle but not entirely subjective rubric! Item, #42 ("If You But Trust in God to Guide You") in the NCH Sampler: Truth is gritty, sentimentality is gouey. What saves Neumark's hymn from the latter--from what I call the creeping compassion now passing for love in much of current culture in & out of the churches--is its masculine tone ("his/his/him/his/he/his/him/his"). So thoroughgoing is the dogma of antimasculinepronominalism that the hymn ends in an unwitting grammatical farce: "God will not fail to guide and bless / those who embrace *God's* faithfulness." Since the modifier of "faithfulness" is the same deity who's the sentence's subject, good usage requires that the modifier be an anaphor (a word "carrying back up" to a previous expression). Properly, the hymnist used an anaphor, viz. "his"; improperly, NCH's bowdlerized version fails to do so. The effect of this violation is to shock (me, at least!) both grammatically & semantically. I've no doubt that when I get to see the new hymnal, I'll find much of this hamfisted claptrap. My karma ran over your dogma--or, as I put it in an open letter 6 Jan 91 (#2469), "Be inconsistent in whatever inclusive-language stylesheet you [the hymnal committee]

agree on....radical feminism is **indigestible** into the Christian religion....flitgunning masculine [words for the deity] only produces dead verbal flies around the altar.... doctrinaire egalitarianism and the Faith are **irreconcilable**. And anyone calling me a sexist for saying so thereby falls under my definition of a radical feminist.".... The letter was addressed to the person I'm to have this public conversation with, the chair of the hymnal committee, who's patiently responded to many personal (non-"open") letters of mine on hymnal issues.

**3 Ecumenicity** Within the past decade, every tiny (they're all comparatively little) mainline church has produced its own sectarian-partisan hymnal, & each has been largely ecumenical in spirit. It's a 40-year ecumenical (WCC) principle that "What we can do better together, we'll not do separately." Well, we've learned to do some things well together--e.g., the Common Lectionary. Should these new denominational hymnals be the last, "the next hymnal committee" (of this Thinksheet's title) to be ecumenical-Christian (or ecumenical-Protestant, or at least mainline-Protestant)? The needs of identity & utility could be cared for by separate editions of the one hymnal, each with its denomination's cover-stamp and distinctive liturgical sections. This accords with NCH's Theological Guidelines (2.92, III): "This Hymnal shares in an emerging ecumenical hymnody....recent ecumenical convergence...."....My writing this was interrupted by a phonecall from the pastor of a UCC church which recently purchased, for its main hymnal, Hope Pub. Co.'s excellent THE WORSHIPING CHURCH, which falls short of being ecumenical but is nonsectarian (or "interdenominational"). I hear that this category of hymnal is selling well, now that denomination-ism is washing out of our mainline churches (as party-loyalty is in politics, as we shall see in tomorrow's elections). But the contra-wave of retribalization, while weaker, prevents the immediate future of the church-family hymnal from looking too gloomy. I cannot be as hopeful for a hymnal--NCH, e.g.--that in addition to being sectarian is ideological-political. Radical feminism will have, I think, a short half-life, & our new hymnal will die with it. As this Thinksheet shows, NCH is in the squeeze between backlash & frontlash even before it's published.

**4 Canonical authority** This guideline asks whether a proposed hymn, or other liturgical material, expresses the Bible's final level of witness vis-a-vis the particular subject. The WCC "Re-Imagining Conference" just a year ago got into big trouble by exalting--to the level of idol, object of false worship!--a less than final level vis-a-vis Chokma-Sophia (feminine). The Bible's final level is masculine--e.g., in the first chapters of John, 1 Corinthians, Colossians, Hebrews: in the NT, wisdom is to be --along with "every [other] thought"--taken "captive to obey Christ" (2Cor.10.5). To learn of the lower, earlier, precanonical levels of witness enriches, as does any other historical study. But the faithful Christian is not free to select, & exalt-sanctify, some precanonical level of witness. We can understand when Jews, in effect, do it: their very existence as a people apart from Christians depends on their freezing Torah at a level that freezes out the NT. A canon (official sacred literature, so declared as of a specific stage of its development) is a people's literary definition of its existence: Quran defines Muslims, Bible defines Christians, Hebrew Bible defines Jews. The determination to (to use a Phyllis Trible word) "depatriarchize" the Christian religion has led radical feminists to despise the Christian canon, so the "Re-Imagining" worship of Sophia as goddess should not have surprised us. (Somewhat more surprising is the worship of "Her" in Sampler 18.)....At Craigville Theological Colloquy XI, UCC President Paul Sherry refused to honor canonical authority, in refusing (though in plenum I'd asked him to) to condemn the "Re-Imagining" Sophia-worship.

This loose-constructivist attitude is a characteristic of the UCC national office(s). An illustration of how it's affected NCH: Sampler p.4 shows that the canonical Apostles' & Nicene creeds are honored by inclusion along with, in each case, a later version. We should have expected this principle to obtain vis-a-vis the UCC Statement of Faith, but not so: all we have is the so-called, misnamed, "Doxological version," which then will serve congregations as the (canonical, national-UCC-promoted) Statement of Faith! In prescribing, canon proscribes: in prescribing the "Doxological version," in effect the hymnal is proscribing Bob Moss' version & the

original, the only "Statement of Faith" without modifiers! No action UCC Synods have taken shows any intention to do what in effect the hymnal does, viz. displace, & cast into virtual oblivion, the (chiefly-Roger-Shinn-crafted) "Statement of Faith," one of our communion's founding documents (at least as much as the Federalist Papers are founding documents of the U.S.A.). Facing this national-office(s) disregard for our UCC roots, one can understand the worries that led to the emergence of the "Confessing Christ" movement, which is especially concerned with disregard for the Preamble to the UCC Constitution. As I said in my July 30 letter to Jim, "The stakes are high, far higher than what happens to the...[new] hymnal."

Why the hymnal's preference for the "Doxological version" (which is, though a prayer version, no more doxological than its predecessors)? Because it's more FC (feministically correct) than Bob Moss' version, which is more FC than the original. Each move away from the original has further diluted the biblical-canonical character of the original.

Dogma disdains history & review processes. The "Doxological version" was hurried from UCC President Avery Post's office directly to the Executive Council (the church authority when Synod is not in session), where it was immediately ratified in spite of five negative votes (members who called for a slower process involving scholars, pastors, & laity). One of those objectors, who was told "We don't have time for theological discussion on this," will be present at the public conversation tomorrow. His response: "If we don't have time for theological discussion, what are we doing here?" Minutes after the Executive Council first saw the proposal, it was stamped "Approved for recommendation to Synod"! Unsurprisingly, Synod rubber-stamped the Executive Council's action, & so a shameful thing became shamefully official as a form of the Statement of Faith--& now has shamefully become the only form our churches are to be offered in their hymnal!....The feminist dogmaticians were not interested in consulting even the original drafter of the Statement of Faith. In a 5 Aug 92 letter to me, Roger Shinn says he "did not know about..."["specific rewordings"] until the revised Statement was adopted by General Synod. Then I...expressed surprise--not as vehemently as you--that the Synod had accepted some substantial theological changes with little, if any, discussion....I...hope PRISM will print your lengthier discussion of the revised Statement. I'd like to see a wider discussion of the issues." (I did #2587 to show what an authentically doxological version might look like.) Conclusion: A bad dogma is running over our good karma. A partisan hymnal presents itself for all the churches, & justifies its radical-feminist spin-control on the claim that the puppies will eat it when they grow up (thus the title, NEW CENTURY HYMNAL); but will it be around when the puppies grow up if now the dogs won't eat it? As you can see, I'm ambivalent as to whether it's good dogfood.

**5 Beware of semantic infiltration!** Clues from the Serenity Prayer: (1) Accept what cannot (should not, canonically) be changed, & (2) Have the courage to change what should be changed. May the next hymnal(s) have the wisdom to know the difference!....The French are worried about the seeping of Americanisms into their language. I am worried about the infiltration of antibiblical words, & antibiblical meanings of biblical words, into Christian discourse (specifically, UCC conversing-singing-teaching-preaching-witnessing--so, #2654, "Semantic Infiltration")....#2592.2, on the back of #2587, is a hymn in which I strike the acceptance/change **balance** without semantic infiltration....For many years at N.Y.TheologicalSeminary I rewrote the hymns for Commencement, always with this balance in mind: I'm for inclusive language & against intrusive language!

I've mentioned two of the three forms of semantic infiltration, viz. of words & of meanings. The third is the most subtle one: it is the infiltration of voids, emptinesses. Here are some of the voids in the NCH Sampler: he/his/him/himself, Father, Son, Lord, King, Kingdom, Master, fellowship. Some voids (e.g., all masculine pronouns for deity, on which #2701) are left as voids; some are filled by replacements. (NB: I'm not saying the whole NCH observes these voids, but the Sampler's voids reveal a paranoid scrupulosity amounting to theological dereliction.) I'm tempted to term the NCH an **exclusive-language** hymnal: it is so dogmatically driven to exclude the Bible's normal-natural way of talking about God--dogs warning the puppies to warn their puppies not to talk about God the way the Bible does.