

# COMMUNIST/NONCOMMUNIST TEXTUAL REVISIONISM:

"AN INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE LECTIONARY," AGAIN ----- ELLIOTT #1823

All propoganda-makers practice, as far as they can get away with it, historical and textual revisionism. Just now (Mar/84), the 10-vol. Chinese ed. of THE ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA is being printed, and the publishers' blurbs emphasize that it is "factual" (while nonCommunists on the editorial committee say this adjective translates out, factually, as "Communist revisionism has been held to a minimum")....This is my second thinksheet on the curious, lamentable, revisionistic Bible published (Coop. Publ. Ass'n.: Jn.Knox, Pilgrim, Westminster Presses, 1983) as AN INCL. LG. LECTIONARY: READINGS FOR YEAR A.

1. Since it's only a lectionary, why call it a "Bible"? Because, when I asked for a Bible in a huge RCC church in Brooklyn, Father Kelly instigated an unsuccessful hunt, then lamely said to me: "We use only the lectionary. It has all the texts we ever use." The 1983 monstrosity, "Prepared for experimental and voluntary use in churches by...NCC," has all the texts liturgically needed for Bible preaching in the 1st of the 3 yrs. of the ecumenical lectionary. Till now, nonRCC lectionaries have been by ref. only, the full biblical texts not being printed: till now, it's been impossible to substitute lectionary for Bible. Till now.

2. Of this lectionary, it can't be said that "movements' (antisexist and antiracist) revisionism has been held to a minimum." E.g.:

(1) Did the committee get Jews approval for including Hagar in Israel's genealogy (Mt.3.9)? She's interpolated (eisegeted) out of fanatic lust not to omit any sexual partner of Abraham! Jews thus are insulted in the interest of decreasing presumed insult to women! Instead of the lectionary's "We have Abraham as our father (and Sarah and Hagar as our mothers)," how much better it would have been to follow TEV: Abraham is "ancestor" (a sex-neutral term). Lamely, the lectionary alibis thus: "Although the people of Israel are not descendants of Hagar, nevertheless her descendants are also children of Abraham." Here's a wide-open door to a new hermeneutical principle: Add anything you think edifying because it "makes an advance on" the biblical text (the quoted material being from Kirkegaard's sardonic remark, "It's hard to make an advance on Socrates!"). (Sorry, I can't give the ref.: deliberately or not, the lectionary has discouraged discussion by not paginating.)

(2) On certain locutions, revisionism is so extensive that footnoting would have been impractically bulky--so the reader, though incorrectly, assumes that the lectionary text is the biblical text. "'God' substituted for 'he' or 'him' is not footnoted." Nor is "Child" substituted for "Son." Nor "ruler" or "monarch" for "King." One now hears clergy given to the barbarous habit of "God...God...God," eliminating the 3rd-pers.-sing. anaphor--a practice the avoidance of which leads to fewer references to the Deity (an instance of weakening religion in the interest of improved English!). The lectionary lends force to this learned stupidity.

(3) Astonishing stratagems are resorted to so as not to offend the delicate feelings of AfroAmericans:

(a) "This lectionary avoids using the term 'slave' wherever possible," choosing instead some trope to translate Heb.-Aram.-Gk. words for slave.

(b) The lectionary uses "terminology other than 'darkness' as a metaphor for sin and evil." Yesterday I helped design a *Tenebrae* ("There was darkness...") service: Should we choose instead the Latin word for some metaphor other than darkness? How innocent (bad sense), to suppose the universal can be made optional! Always/everywhere the human organism, individual and social, has associated darkness with threat/evil/punishment and light with promise/good/reward. M.L. King, Jr., did not say "darkies" or "niggers" or "blacks": he preferred the dignified "negro" and "AfroAmerican." (Similarly, I say "Caucasian," not "white.") Other negative connotations of "black" are dirt and secrecy-with-evil-intent. Nothing, in English or any other language, can clean up "black"; and it was self-defeating of negroes to the left of King to choose "black" (usu. capitalized). But I say

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"black" in social-change context, and I'm saddened that the lectionary tries to change the biblical texts to honor this current rhetorical term in American socio-political logomachy--a ploy at the same low intelligence-level as metaphorizing and then (forgetting you've done that) reifying the metaphor (which is the very error the lectionary worries about when the common people hear God as "father"). On the reverse side, the lectionary moans about the light/white/good/valuable set of associations. But when and where, pray, have blonds not been preferred (or at least envied)? Partly because rare: only ca.5% of humanity is blond, and the rare is valuable (and, sometimes, numinous: Central American aborigines were expecting a blond messiah). Further, blonds, whom "gentlemen prefer," are golden-haired--and who's to badmouth gold? And blond hair shimmers like sunlight: who's to badmouth the sun? And when you clean something, most things, the color-shift is from darker to lighter:\*and who's to badmouth cleanliness? (I'm tempted to speak of the valence of blondness in Homer and other classics of humankind, but I resist the temptation. Here, I content myself with expressing appall at the nutty notion that a committee at 475 Riverside Drive can Canute reality--reality, I say: universal psychological truth, not just culture-engendered opinion.) (An aside: The blond or Northern European, including the Lombards of N.Italy, are even "good" when experienced as evil: they have been, historically, good at conquest, and so are secretly envied even where spoken of as "white devils.") (\*"Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."--Ps.51.7.) One's skin is advantage/disadvantage depending where one is historically/geographically/socially; but for both natural and evil reasons, you're best bet is to be born blond.

3. As we are under and face-to-face with the Creator all equal, let not blonds be proud or nonblonds envious. In the Intro. to his DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA, Tocqueville well says that vertical equality is, "by Providence," an historical assignment to work out equality horizontally. The abuse of truth (as in this lectionary) cannot so honor the Creator, who is also God of Truth.

4. The lectionary distorts, vis-a-vis divine names, the usual and the unusual by rewriting the texts to reverse the two: while in the Bible God is (to coin a term) metasexual (beyond, but inclusive of, male and female) in a few texts, he's usu. masculine--indeed, the only exceptions being a few "beyond" reff. (in which God is self-dissociating from creation or some particular creature) and a few metaphorical reff. in simile form (e.g., "As a mother comforts,..."). "Feminist interpretation" blows these texts way out of their relative size, and fills them with the hot air of Greek-and-modern philosophizing about the divine (as being beyond anthropomorphizing and esp. beyond anthropopathizing). Then this jerrybuilt "God" is fed back into the Bible and emerges fullblown in this lectionary. Presto!

5. This revisionist lectionary is having, and will have, the opposite of its intended effects. As reality and tradition resist the revisionism, "radical" feminists and many nonradical women will become more alienated than they were before, and Christianity (and Judaism) will look more like a religion for men only than ever has been true before. In the churches, I've heard not one good word for the lectionary--only laughter, and anger. (Besides, I've been a church bureaucrat, and I know how easy it is to sit 'round a table and concoct a dogfood recipe that the dogs won't touch.)

6. Where do I draw the line? On textual revisionism (i.e., corrupting the text of classics--as in a 19th-c. laughable cleaned-up text of Shakespeare). I often pray, privately and publicly, "Father-Mother God": I'm for inclusive language in free discourse. I'm even for it in hymns: I desexized the hymns for NYTS commencements. But DON'T TAMPER WITH THE SACRED TEXT, on pain of (1) dishonoring truth and thus the God of truth, (2) distorting the classic roots of our religion, and (3) doing, to the churches and the believers, more harm than good.

7. The lectionary deals with metaphor as a static, literary device, without respect for (Tillich, Eliade, Ricoeur, et al) metaphor-as-symbol/sacrament in religion. This shallow, impoverished handling of the metaphoric has a parallel in the lectionary's shallow, impoverished handling of human sexuality, sexual differentiation being treated as "incidental" (so, no hormonal assignments).