

# New Hymnal Minimizes Him

**Feminism Controls New Worship Book.** By 740-252 the ELCA Churchwide Assembly directed the Office of the Presiding Bishop to complete the new hymnal for ELCA congregations. A hard bound edition will be available in October 2006. (The draft for final review is available online at [www.renewingworship.org](http://www.renewingworship.org).)

One of the stated goals of the new worship book is: "minimizing the unnecessary use of gender-specific terms" (Hymn Texts, p.2). One pastor who reviewed the new hymns notes the following changes:

- Masculine pronouns deleted in 70+ hymns.
- "Father" deleted in at least 17 hymns.
- "King" eliminated from 6 hymns.
- "Lord" eliminated from at least 5 hymns.

Whoa! Who determines what is "unnecessary use"? The ELCA's judgment is quite different from the judgment of scholars such as Gerhard Forde or Robert Jenson.

Below are samples of some language changes the ELCA's *Renewing Worship* team has made to minimize "the unnecessary use of gender-specific terms."

## Separating the Father from his Son

5002 - *A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth*

LBW: God sent his Son from heaven

RW: God sent the Son from heaven

5415 - *Of the Father's Love Begotten*

RW: Of God's very heart begotten (RW provides this as an alternative first line of the hymn.)

5158 - *From Heaven Above*

LBW: Glory to God ...Who unto us his Son has giv'n.

RW: Glory to God ...Who unto us the Son has giv'n

## Separating the Father from his Spirit

5368 - *O Day Full of Grace*

LBW: God came to us ...at Pentecost/his Spirit new...

RW: God came to us ...at Pentecost/the Spirit new..

## Eliminating "Father"

5116 - *Come, O Almighty King*

LBW: Father all glorious

RW: Maker all glorious

5436 - *Praise and Thanksgiving*

LBW: Praise and Thanksgiving, Father we offer

RW: Praise and Thanksgiving, God, we would offer

5045 - *At the Name of Jesus*

LBW: 'Tis the Father's pleasure

RW: It is God's good pleasure

5146 - *Lord God, We Praise You*

LBW: Father, we praise you, now the night is over

RW: Lord God, we praise you, now the night....

"Lord" is added here but deleted elsewhere.

## Eliminating "His" (God/Holy Spirit)

5472 - *Sent Forth by God's Blessing*

LBW: The people of God from his dwelling take leave.

RW: The people of God from this dwelling take leave.

5124 - *Come, You Thankful People, Come*

LBW: the Lord ... shall take his harvest home.

RW: the Lord ...shall take the harvest home

5105 - *Come Down O Love Divine*

LBW: Wherein the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling

RW: Wherein the Holy Spirit makes a dwelling

5348 - *Now Thank We All Our God*

LBW: And keep us in his grace

RW: And keep us strong in grace

5413 - *O Worship the King*

LBW: Oh, gratefully sing his pow'r and his love

RW: Oh, gratefully sing God's power and love

## Eliminating "His" (Christ)

5149 - *Fling Wide the Door*

LBW: The Savior brings His great salvation to the earth

Pronouns add needed clarity and specificity to communication. Avoiding pronouns for God leads to confusion about who is being addressed.

RW: The Savior of the world who brings  
salvation's gift to all the earth

### Eliminating "King"

5296 - *Lift High the Cross*

LBW: Our king victorious, Christ, the Son of God

RW: The Lamb victorious, Christ, the Son of God

### Eliminating "Kingdom"

5125 - *Comfort, Comfort Now My People*

LBW: Since the kingdom now is here

RW: Since the reign of God is here

### Eliminating "Lord"

5454 - *Rejoice the Lord is King*

RW: Rejoice, for Christ is King

"King" is kept here but "Lord" is out.

5290 - *Let the Whole Creation Cry*

LBW: Let ... creation cry, "Glory to the Lord on high!"

RW: Let .... creation cry, "Glory be to God on high!"

5154 - *For the Beauty of the Earth*

LBW: Christ, our Lord, to you we raise

RW: Christ, our God, to you we raise

### Adding "Mother" Imagery

5521 - *God Enthroned in Mystery*

RW: Bring the tender tale true of the pelican;  
bathe me, mother Christ, in what thy bosom ran;  
blood that but one drop of has the world to win;  
all the world forgiveness of its world of sin.

5145 - *Faith of Our Fathers*

RW: Faith of our mothers, daring faith/your work for  
Christ is love revealed.

5333 - *Mothering God, You Gave Me Birth*

RW: Mothering God, you gave me birth  
in the bright morning of this world.  
Creator, source of ev'ry breath,  
you are my rain, my wind, my sun.

### Hymns with Sexual Undertones

5267 - *Jesus, My Sweet Pleasure* first verse:

Jesus, my sweet pleasure,  
perfect joyful leisure,  
jewel bright and true:  
how my heart has fretted,  
my desire so whetted,  
longing after you!  
Lamb of God, my own betrothed,  
nothing in this life so moves me,  
holds me gently, soothes me.

### Eliminating "men"

5043 - *As With Gladness Travelers Bold*

LBW: As With Gladness Men of Old

5379 - *O God, Our Help in Ages Past*

LBW: Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all its sons  
away

RW: Time, like an ever-rolling stream, its children bears  
away

Left-wing churches, like the ELCA, are captive to feminist demands, but in the secular world feminist revisions of language have not carried the day. For example, even *The New York Times* (September 22, 2005) uses terms like businessmen, fishermen, spokesman, and phrases like "putting a man on the moon."

### No longer Christ-centered

5525 - *There's a Wideness in God's Mercy*

LBW vs.3: There is plentiful redemption

In the blood that has been shed;  
There is joy for all the members  
In the sorrows of the head.

RW vs 3: But we make this love too narrow  
by false limits of our own;  
and we magnify its strictness;  
with a zeal God will not own.

Special pleading for gay sex?

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### Alternative (PC) Texts

The following hymns offer 2 texts: the standard, or slightly revised, version and a second politically-correct alternative:

5368 - *O Day Full of Grace*

The alternative (PC) hymn text deletes the cross, the atonement, and Pentecost, as well as "Lord" and "he."

See also:

5439 - *Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven*

5145 - *Faith of our Fathers*

5447 - *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty*

**Under the Cover of Confusion.** In the new hymnal the term "Father" is sometimes deleted; other times kept. "Lord" is sometimes deleted; other times kept, etc., etc., etc. Why are the feminist language changes so erratic? What's the pay-off?

**Deniability.** ELCA leaders can point to hymns where the language was not changed in order to deny that a feminist agenda is controlling the project. To be sure, they have not tinkered with some hymns – particularly Christmas carols and some obvious favorites.

There is no wholesale erasing of Father-language, or "Lord," or "King."

Nevertheless, the new hymnal moves decisively in a feminist direction. While some feminists won't be satisfied, the hymnal largely concedes to their demands even as it does not quite give them everything they want.

It's like "local option" for GLBT clergy. Once it is established and accepted in some situations, it is in principle acceptable everywhere.

**God Became a Specific Person.** God has a name, just like you and me. God's name is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Where God's name is traded for abstractions, such as "Eternal One," "Holy One of Blessing," God's identity is obscured – just as your identity would be obscured if

people stopped calling you by your name and said instead, "Hi Nice One" or "Thank you, Curmudgeon." Or "Bless you, Big Benefactor." Vague accolades are no substitute for someone's name.

But, progressives say, what about those people who find masculine language for God a problem? First, it's not a new problem. In the 1930's "progressives" wanted to minimize Jesus' Jewishness because it offended them. That the Lord of heaven and earth became a Jewish man in the first century offends our desire to have a god in our own image.

**The Scandal of Particularity.** As the Gospel of John says: "No one has ever seen God; but the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (John 1:18). And Paul: "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified..." (1 Cor 1:22).

The one true gospel has always been a scandal and an offense. He was put to death "because he not only broke the Sabbath but also called God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18). He identifies with us and we with him because he was tempted like us, bore our sins,

and died our death, *even while* he is male and Jewish, *not because* he is male or female, old or young, black or white.

**The Frog Problem.** Like the slowly boiling frog, ELCA congregations have been gradually exposed to feminist revisions of God language – in the LBW and more so in *With One Voice*. The heat is turned up several notches in *Renewing Worship*, but the people in the pews are already groggy. Many won't be able to identify the new changes. Some changes are blatant, but many are subtle.

Subtle deception – that's how the Evil One works in the church. As Paul writes: "Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor 11:14).

**God is not to be named in analogy to human fathers, not in terms of abstractions like "fatherhood," but only in relation to Jesus Christ. The name God acquires for himself is strictly and exclusively "the Father of Jesus Christ," and one can rightly call God "Father" only as one is properly related to the Son.**

Gerhard Forde, "Naming the One Who is Above Us," in *Speaking the Christian God*, p.118.