APPENDIX H

LANGUAGE ISSUES

This Appendix has three sections: a statement concerning "just language", a policy concerning inclusive language and an update to that policy.

JUST LANGUAGE STATEMENT

> *And God said, "Let there be light!" And there was light. . . And God called the light "day", and the darkness God called "night" (Gen 1:3 & 5a)*

> *In the beginning was the Word...(John 1:1a)*

From the creation story in Genesis 1 to the opening words of the Gospel of John, Christian faith tradition has taught followers about the power of the spoken word. In Genesis 1, God speaks into being all of creation culminating in the creation of humanity in God's own image, thus giving us the power also to speak into being new realities. In the Gospel of John, the writer is seeking to proclaim the power of God made manifest in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, thus creating another new reality. In word and deed, Jesus revealed God's love and grace to all whom he met, and he charged his followers to go and "preach the Good News." Language thus creates, shapes, and gives voice to our world, our lives, and our faith.

Lexington Theological Seminary's mission is to train women and men to be leaders of the Church. To that end, the administration, faculty, staff, and students covenant together to strive for both our written and spoken language to reflect the equality of the people of God and to maintain the mystery of God. Such "Just Language – language that reflects our changing consciousness about God, the universe, ourselves, class, gender relations, race, disabilities, and violence – is essential if we are to overcome injustices and hatred that obstruct peace, equality, and harmony for which we long."[1]

LANGUAGE ABOUT THE HUMAN COMMUNITY

As such a powerful tool, language can be used both to include or to exclude. Words can speak a word of hope or they can be used to destroy all hope. Speech can build up a person in love or it can tear down out of hate. Words can indeed hurt or heal. The Israelites understood the particular power inherent in the act of naming something or someone. When the human ("Adam") is brought a new animal, the human names the animal and thus is claiming a position of power over the animal world. Outside of the egalitarian garden, the man names his wife "Eve", and signals the beginnings of a patriarchal culture in which men will have power over women. Without voices and often unnamed, women and other minorities are excluded from human realms of power but certainly not from God's love. Time and again, the stories of Israel proclaim a God who takes notice of the powerless and chooses those whom society deems "unworthy" to do God's will.

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[1] Kathleen Ashe, "Foreword," in *Creating Just Language* (Chicago: The 8th Day Center for Justice, 1999), 4.

This concern for the marginalized and voiceless was revealed again in the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. The gospel stories show Jesus going against the exclusive rules of society to be among those who most needed to hear that they too were loved by God. As those who seek to follow Jesus, Christians are commissioned to proclaim the Gospel of God's radically inclusive love for all people. Gospel words should not exclude anyone from knowing God's love and grace. Rather, amid a broken world, Christians must speak into being a new reality of God's reign where all are welcome.

LANGUAGE ABOUT THE DIVINE

Often the discussion about language used to describe God is presented as less strict and reliant more upon one's personal theology. While no one should be told how or what to believe about the Divine, leaders of the Church are often called upon to speak about God on behalf of the gathered community. In such situations, one's personal beliefs about God can no longer be the only criteria for language about God. Speaking in front of and/or behalf of a group requires leaders to be sensitive to the diversity of the gathered community, both in human characteristics and in their beliefs. Thus, language about the Divine cannot be seen as less important nor less powerful than language about the human community.

As was stated earlier, the power of naming someone was understood among the Israelite community. To know someone's name was to have some intimate information about who that person was. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus renames Simon as Peter, representing his trust that Peter would continue the work Jesus had begun on earth (Matt 16:18). Nowhere was the power of naming more important and dangerous than in human attempts to name the Divine. When Moses asked to know God's name, he was given a phrase that defied translation and comprehension. The phrase, 'eyeh asher 'eyeh, maintained the mystery of the God who calls humanity into covenant. Similarly, when Jacob wrestled with the stranger at the Jabbok, he too demanded a name but instead Jacob received a new name.

Still, humans have used words to speak of God and of their experiences of God. Hagar, the only person in the First Testament to "name" God, called the Divine "el roi", which reflected her experience of having been seen by a God who took notice of her suffering and who gave her a blessing. Recognizing the inherent danger of limiting God through human words, the Israelites were careful not to solidify their God into one image or name. The third commandment not only referred to making tangible images of God but also to concretizing God into verbal images as well. The same prohibition is found in Deut 4:15-18.

> Since you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire, take care and watch yourselves closely, [16] so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure – the likeness of male or female, [17] the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, [18] the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. (NRSV)

Acknowledging the mystery of God and the impossibility of finite language to name the Infinite, Christians must also take care in how they name and speak of God. Metaphorical language is a common way for humans to describe God, but the danger is always there for God to be equated with the metaphor and thus produce a static image of God. Given the biblical mandates against limited God to one image and the multitude of Divine descriptions found in scripture, Christians are called to expand both their own and the faith communities'

understanding of the God who called Israel out of bondage, who brought forth new life out of the death of Jesus, and who continues to call the faithful to work for a just world.

CONTINUING DIALOGUE

Language is in a constant state of flux as new words are created to name new realities (e.g., Internet, web, etc.) and other words fall out of use when they no longer speak of contemporary life. The language of faith is a particularly unique combination. Much of the faith is reliant upon telling the "old, old stories", but for the faith to continue, those stories must be told in language that will transmit the Gospel to new generations. While it is true that many congregations are resistant to changes dubbed "inclusive language", God calls men and women to challenge the status quo. This call has been answered by the faithful throughout time in the lives of the Israelite prophets, Jesus, Paul, Sojourner Truth, Emily Tubman, Martin Luther King and others who proclaimed the Gospel when it was not always a welcomed message. If leaders of the Church do not offer their congregations the opportunities to expand their vocabularies for humanity and for God, then they are doing a disservice to those people. The liberating Word of God only has the power to transform lives if our language invites persons into this new reality and does not exclude anyone.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE POLICY

Regardless of the intention of language users in the past, it is simply to be acknowledged as a fact of present importance that certain traditional diction is now experienced by many women and men as needlessly exclusive of awareness of women, or unfairly inaccurate in depicting reality, or, at times, actually pejorative in referring to women. The following procedures are, therefore, recommended for the guidance of all members of the community.

Written Materials, including the various in-house publications, papers and reports for courses, sermons, etc.

    A. Avoid using generalizations which are needlessly gendered. By many, they are not understood to refer to all persons. For instance:

For:	Use:
Mankind	All people, humanity
Manpower	Staff, personnel, human resources
Chairman	Chair, Chairperson
Founding Fathers	Founders, forebears, ancestors
Sons of God	Children of God, people of God
Gentlemen's agreement	Tacit agreement, verbal agreement
Man the machines	Operate the machines
Master the skill	Achieve/accomplish the skill
Strive manfully	Strive arduously
Man hours	Work hours
Brothers/Brethren	Brothers & Sisters, kindred

For most such diction there are ready synonyms, if one is not at hand, and cannot be found, rewrite to avoid the problem. For example: We are one great brotherhood. *We share a common heritage and destiny.*

B. Do not use masculine pronouns unless referring to a specific male.

   1. The pronoun can be deleted: e.g., The average American drinks (his) coffee black.

   2. The pronoun can be changed to an article: e.g., The Preacher is the best judge of his (the) sermon.

   3. Plural pronouns can be used: The student(s) will get his (their) grades at the end of the term. A derived principle here is: don't use the singular for general statements, unless you really mean singular.

   4. Passive construction can be used to avoid pronoun use: e.g., The writer gathers his material from many places. Changed: The writer's materials are gathered from many places.

   5. Rewriting from another vantage can be used to avoid pronouns: e.g., "Does a person ask questions merely to draw attention to himself?" can be changed to, "Do we (I) ask questions merely to draw attention to ourselves (myself)?

   6. Gendered pronouns cannot be utterly abandoned without serious loss. When they are used, attempt to write reflecting awareness of, and reference to, both genders; e.g., Each student must bring his own book. She must also write and turn in her own reports.

C. Avoid using diction which contributes to stereotyping.

   1. Assumptions about occupation, role, attributes of character, appearance, etc; e.g., The doctor spoke to the nurse; she told him to scrub up. He is a shrewd lawyer and his wife is a pretty blond. She is a woman lawyer and he is a male secretary. The little women…the weaker sex…the fair sex…the girls…manly strength…aggressive woman…gentle as a woman…submissive operates…boyish bravado…etc.

   2. Consistently putting males first in reference to both sexes.

   3. Citing or illustrating with only, or mainly, male referents and examples, or with activities normally involving only males.

   4. Non-parallel mention of sexes; e.g., man and wife, men and girls, boys and their dates.

Special Considerations in specific situations

A. Language in hymns.

    1. Avoid using hymns filled with exclusive language.

    2. Delete offending verses of hymns.

    3. Print in worship program an amended text of hymn.

    4. Seek other hymnals which may already have changes.

    5. Take responsibility to urge hymnal revision.

B. Language in sermons and other materials composed for worship. In addition to counsel offered earlier:

    1. Use illustrations and examples referring to both genders.

    2. Purposely cross over from gender stereotypes; e.g., refer to a lawyer who is a woman, a man who is a secretary, but allow the gender to appear pronominally; do not point it out (this supports stereotyping).

C. Language in other liturgical materials.

    1. Compose prayer aware of the whole congregation; visualize and use images which include all.

    2. Some traditional forms of creed, litany, call to worship, etc., are rather fixed in our memories and function by rote. These should be recognized as posing special problems not easily answered in a way widely acceptable.

    3. Some of these items have passed through successive changes and may even now be changing in other ways. In using newer forms, incorporating inclusive language is more easily done.

D. Language in Scripture lessons.

    1. Modern language translations may avoid the exclusive language of older versions.

    2. The leader may offer an original translation, which amends language inappropriately gendered in other versions. To wit: students of the language can determine that the gendering is merely grammatical and the intention of the passage is clearly inclusive.

    3. Gendered language in the text which clearly represents an intention to show gender should be recognized as posing a special problem not easily solved to the satisfaction of all. Changing such language in reading a familiar version may be counter-productive with many hearers.

E. Language in reference to God.

   1. In sermons and other materials composed for the occasion, avoid excessive use of gendered language referring to God and the Holy Spirit. Use attributes of God which are not gendered; e.g., Creator, Sustainer, Nurturer, to replace overused male designations. Descriptions of God should convey the parental rather than the specifically "mother" or "father" role.

   2. The gender of Jesus Christ is clear, but excessive attention drawn to it in language appears to make it more important than it is.

   3. References to some characteristics of God as female, (e.g. tenderness and caring) are probably counter-productive, since they appear to be based on the very stereotype about "male" and "female" characteristics which exacerbate some of the problems of inclusive thought. Likewise, references to stereotypically "male" attributes; e.g. God of battle, etc.

   4. It is acknowledged that to refer to God as female may be offensive to some and may be counter-productive. It is also acknowledged that to refer to God exclusively in male terminology is also offensive to some and may be counter-productive.

   5. Ministers have the responsibility to expand their own concepts of God and the concepts of their congregations. Sensitivity and creativity are needed on the part of all seeking to proclaim the God who is greater than our words have allowed us to understand.

CLARIFICATION OF GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE POLICY Approved Fall 1992

The following clarifications were added to the Recommended Policy Concerning Inclusive Language by vote of the faculty:

LANGUAGE REFERRING TO HUMAN BEINGS

1. Materials composed by students and faculty members for classes, worship, or other seminary events use inclusive language with respect to people.

2. For the public reading of Scripture in seminary classes or at seminary events, translations are used which follow the principles used in the translation of the NRSV: "in references to men and women, masculine-oriented language should be eliminated as far as this can be done without altering passages that reflect the historical situation of ancient patriarchal culture." ("To the Reader" – translation committee's preface to the NRSV). In general, this means that when the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek intended to specify one gender, the English should specify that gender. When, however, the original intended to include both men and women, the English should be specific in that regard. Examples: Judges 7:21 is correctly translated, "Every man stood in his place all around the camp, and all the men in camp ran; they cried out and fled, "because all Israelite and Midianite warriors were men. I Corinthians 15:1 is correctly translated, "Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you." because by using the word *adelphoi*, which is masculine plural, Paul does **not** intend to specify that the message is only for the male members of the church at

Corinth. The principle for the use of translations applies to printed translations read as they are published, to translations altered to make them inclusive with respect to persons, and to translations made directly from the original for the occasion.

3. The words of hymns and anthems may be made inclusive in accordance with appropriate copyright considerations. If alterations cannot be made, and it is considered necessary to use the hymn or anthem in question even though it uses masculine language for all persons, this usage should be balanced elsewhere in the service or explained on the worship bulletin.

LANGUAGE FOR GOD

1. The traditional Trinitarian formula: "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" may be used without alteration. It should not, however, be over-used in any one service (as for example, in the traditional order for Morning Prayer, which employs the *Gloria patri* repeatedly).

2. The traditional or ecumenical form of the Lord's Prayer may be used without alteration, beginning, "our Father…."

3. Gender-neutral language for God is **recommended** in materials composed for classes, worship or other seminary events. Masculine and feminine images for God may be alternated in worship or in other materials as a substitute for gender-neutral language.

4. On SOME occasions it may be appropriate to plan a worship **service** using only masculine or only feminine imagery for God. Examples might be: (a) feminist worship using only feminine images for God as a corrective to centuries of male-only imagery, (b) historic re-enactments of worship services using authentic texts which use masculine imagery only, or (c) services in traditions that require certain specific language, such as the Book of Common Prayer. On such occasions, the worship bulletin should explain the reason for the non-inclusive language.

5. The reading of Scripture from the *Inclusive Language Lectionary* and the altering of other translations to use gender-neutral or gender-balanced language for God is permitted.

ACCOUNTABILITY-WITHIN THE SEMINARY COMMUNITY

1. The custom will be continued of publishing the "Recommended Policy Concerning Inclusive Language" in the *Student Handbook*. These clarifications will become part of the recommended policy in the *Handbook,* and the presence of the handbook online and available to all students (M.Div., M.A., D.Min and Special) will constitute adequate notification to students of the importance of language issues in the seminary community. The Seminary may also emphasize inclusive language at special gatherings. Faculty members have complete freedom to specify the way in which language issues will be treated in classroom discussion and written work. If no explicit statement is made, students should assume that they are responsible for knowing the written recommendations.

2. Students, faculty, and staff members who choose to use exclusive language for people or who choose to use God-language of one specific gender only (thus choosing not to follow these recommendations) may

be informed by any member of the community about the effect their usage has on others. Such reminders are generally most effective in private conversations.

Visitors to the Seminary

1. Visiting speakers will be given a copy of the recommended guidelines with these additional clarifications at least two weeks before they arrive on campus, if possible.

2. Ordinary courtesy suggests that visiting speakers will not be confronted publicly about their language. Obviously, however, if a speaker introduces the topic of inclusive language during her or his remarks, the subject is then open for comment in the discussion period, if any.