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“There’s Not Much Lord in this Church Service”

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The movement toward gender-neutral language for God has picked up steam in recent years, and liberal churches have been busy rewriting language for worship and theology. Just last year the Presbyterian Church (USA) voted to “receive” a document that called for Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to be replaced or supplemented with triads such as “Sun, Light, and Burning Ray,” “Overflowing Font, Living Water, and Flowing River,” and “Fire that Consumes, Sword that Divides, and Storm that Melts Mountains.”

That report even suggested an explicitly female triad — “Compassionate Mother, Beloved Child, Life-Giving Womb.” The report was controversial, but this kind of nonsense has been spreading for some time now. Many feminists simply insist that they cannot or will not worship a God who names Himself exclusively in male terms. Yet, to rename God is to create an idol — a false god of our own creativity and invention. Put simply — God gets to name Himself.

Now, a report out of Tucson, Arizona indicates just how far many churches have already gone down the road of reinventing God. As Stephanie Innes reports in the *Arizona Daily Star*, some churches have banished the word “Lord.”

From her article:

At Tucson’s largest Episcopal church, St. Philip’s in the Hills, the creators of an alternative worship service called Come & See are bucking tradition by rewriting what have become prescribed ways of worship.

For the faithful, that means God isn’t referred to as “him,” and references to “the Lord” are rare.

“Lord” has become a loaded word conveying hierarchical power over things, “which in what we have recorded in our sacred texts, is not who Jesus understood himself to be,” St. Philip’s associate rector Susan Anderson-Smith said.

“The way our service reads, the theology is that God is love, period,” St. Philip’s deacon Thomas Lindell added. “Our service has done everything it can to get rid of power imagery. We do not pray as though we expect the big guy in the sky to come and fix everything.”

These statements are nothing short of amazing. It is hard to imagine that they are meant to be taken seriously, but they clearly are. Take, for example, Susan Anderson-Smith’s argument that the word *Lord* “has become a loaded word conveying hierarchical power over things.” Has *become* such a word? The word, translated from both Greek and Hebrew word forms, has *always* meant hierarchy. Indeed, the word is meaningless without that meaning. Later, she expanded this point even further:

In the strictest Christian sense, “Lord” comes from the Greek word kyrios, which Greek culture in the first century understood in much different ways, Anderson-Smith said. Evidence suggests the word was used in talking about Jesus as the fullest embodied revelation of God, but it had a lot less to do with hierarchy than what the word means now, she said.

Once again, her statements are directly at odds with the truth — and a truth quite easily demonstrated. There is not only every reason to reject her argument that “Lord” is more hierarchical in meaning today than in the biblical era — there is good reason to see the truth as the precise opposite of her argument. Indeed, the most powerful display of the essentially hierarchical nature of this divine title is found in the New Testament itself:

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is

Lord, to the glory of God the Father [Philippians 2:9-11].

This verse stresses the hierarchical nature of the title. One day, every single knee will bow to Jesus Christ as *Lord*. It should go without saying that no creature will miss the hierarchical character of that moment.

The problem is deepened when Anderson-Smith proceeds to explain that Jesus was not interested in hierarchy at all. Jesus, she would have us think, was a modern egalitarian. The absurdity of this is breathtaking. Jesus — the *Lord* — called His disciples to follow Him. He did not follow them. He commanded them to obey His words. He did not obey theirs. Jesus castigated those who called Him Lord but did not obey Him [Luke 6:46]. He was not a mere “mentor” and “companion.”

Deacon Thomas Lindell’s comments add the icing to Rev. Anderson-Smith’s cake. He boasts of having removed all the “power imagery” from the church’s worship services. That, we might imagine, is rather hard to do. If God is not all-powerful, why worship? Without an acknowledgment of God’s power, we are left with little to say. A God who is not powerful cannot help, much less save. What can you then sing? “O God our [well-intended but less-than-sovereign Spirit of helpfulness] in ages past?”

There is more:

St. Philip’s isn’t the only local church to re-examine its language. Other local religious leaders already are eschewing the use of “Lord” for similar reasons.

First Congregational United Church of Christ in Midtown even has a different name for The Lord’s Prayer. They call it “The Prayer of Our Creator.”

“We do still use the word ‘Lord’ on occasion, but we are suspicious of it,” First Congregational pastor Briget Nicholson said. “Inclusive language is important. Our United Church of Christ hymnal does have hymns that will say ‘Father’ and ‘God.’ but the next verse will always then say ‘Mother’ and ‘God.’ It’s gender-balanced.”

Pastor Briget Nicholson is “suspicious” of the word “Lord” but will use it sparingly, so long as other terms — terms not found in the Bible as divine names — “balance” the use of “Lord.”

As one might suspect, other doctrinal changes are afoot in these churches as well. Deacon Lindell explains that his church doesn’t stress “the blood and gore of the crucifixion.” The St. Philip’s congregation appears to play to the liberal wing of the Episcopal Church USA while Pastor Briget Nicholson is identified on [her church’s Web site](#) along with her female “spouse.”

When you replace the biblical names for God with those of your own choosing, you create a new religion. The evidence for this flows directly from the rejection of the Bible as the authoritative revelation of God’s names. If the Bible cannot be trusted to name God correctly, then why accept its verdict on homosexuality? If the biblical names for God can be updated and renovated, then why not do the same with the doctrine of atonement?

Reporter Stephanie Innes, describing the “Come & See” worship service at St. Philip’s, noted: “There’s not much Lord in this church service.” It may well be that more accurate words have never been used in such a report — or more damning.

We discussed this issue on Tuesday’s edition of *The Albert Mohler Program* [[listen here](#)]. Stephanie Innes of the *Arizona Daily Star* joined us in the last segment of the program.

