

EPS POLICY ON INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

In line with many theological publishing houses and universities in this country, it is the policy of Education for Parish Service to require inclusive language.

1. The terms 'man' and 'men' are to be used only for males. Where both women and men are intended then other terms must be found.

thus we may say:

the human person
the human being
each person
humanity
humankind
the human race

turns to God in faith

2. The use of the possessive:

rather than: **the hearts of men**

use: **people's hearts**

or perhaps better: **human hearts**

3. The persistent use of 'he' and 'his' to refer to a person of either sex is NOT acceptable. For example:

Man is saved through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is conscious of his past sins and he experiences God's forgiveness.

The use of the plural can often be used to avoid exclusivity. Thus:

Human beings are saved through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They are conscious of their past sins and they experience God's forgiveness.

4. It may not always be possible to avoid using 'he' 'him' and 'himself' in relation to God, without sounding stilted or losing some of the intended meaning. Nonetheless it is NOT acceptable to use these pronouns unnecessarily, or where an acceptable alternative is available. Whether the following alternatives are acceptable or not will be a matter of individual judgement.

Let us consider the following two sentences, which are overloaded with male pronouns:

God himself, in his goodness, sent his only Son into the world. In doing so he gave himself for the salvation of the world he had created.

And now let us consider some possible alternatives:

'God himself'. The reflexive pronoun in this phrase is often used automatically, out of habit and piety. If all that is meant is 'God', then only 'God' should be used. If the point is that this is the very God, then 'The very God' should be used. If what is meant is that this was truly God, then 'It truly was God' should be used.

in his goodness. 'out of goodness' loses very little of the sense of 'in his goodness' apart from the false implication that God is male.

sent his only son into the world It may be that the 'his' in this instance is the best option we have to date. However 'sent God's only son into the world' would be an acceptable alternative.

he gave himself This could be replaced by 'God gave of God's own self'.

the world he had created This could be replaced by 'the world that God had created.'

What might we end up with?

God, out of goodness, sent his only Son into the world. In doing so God gave of God's own self for the world that God had created.

It is clear that work on inclusive language has a long way to go. As a minimum requirement students should avoid the routine use of 'God *himself*...'

WHY INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE?

1. When referring to the human being

The reason for inclusive language when referring to the human being is to guard against exclusion. In the 1970s and 1980s the International Commission on English in the Liturgy recognized the need to stop using male-only nouns and pronouns in theology and liturgy when both male and female were intended.

‘The failure of much of liturgical and theological language adequately to recognize the presence of women seems effectively to exclude them from full and integral participation in the life of the Church, and this exclusion can prevent the whole Church from experiencing the fullness of the Christian community’. (Eucharistic Prayers ICEL October 1980)

It is for this reason (to prevent the exclusion of women) that the words of consecration, which refer to the blood of the new and everlasting covenant that ‘will be shed for you and for all men’ have been changed by our bishops, so that the word ‘men’ is deleted.

The historical background to the prevalence of exclusive language makes its use all the more unacceptable. It was not simply that it was more convenient to use ‘men’ to refer to people generally. Men were seen to be the norm for humanity, and women a lesser or deficient version. This teaching is now officially rejected by the Catholic Church.

2. When referring to God

The reason for inclusive language when referring to God is to guard against idolatry: the worship of a false male 'god'. The Christian tradition has tended to exclude from its liturgical practice and prayer life the female images for God used in Scripture. The persistent use of male pronouns reinforces the maleness of the images that are consistently used, and has led many to believe that God IS male. God, who is above and beyond sexuality, who indeed brought the distinction between maleness and femaleness into being, is reduced in the mind of the believer to the level of the created world.

To compound the distortion, when God is viewed as male, the male human being is seen to have a closer identification with God. The status of woman as creature made in the image and likeness of God is then called into question.

Suggested Reading:

King, Nicholas, 1998, "The Child of Person" – Does Inclusive Language Really Matter?' in *Whispers of Liberation: Feminist Perspectives on the New Testament*, New York/ Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press.

Inman, Anne, 'No Neutral Stance' in *The Clergy Review*, July 1986 Vol. LXXI No. 7.