

Gendered 'Amen' Not the Most Concerning Theological Misstep in Congressional Prayer

Rep. Emanuel Cleaver, a United Methodist pastor, is facing heat for his prayer over the 117th Congress. The "all inclusive" prayer contained deeply problematic theological references.

People are in an uproar over Cleaver's unusual addition to a common prayer ending.

"We pray to the monotheistic god, Brahma, and 'god,' known by many names by many different faiths," Cleaver prayed. He closed his prayer with "Amen and a-woman."

The references have commentators wondering if the word choice correlates to newly reelected Democratic Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's new House rules outlawing the use of gender-specific pronouns.

While the "a-woman" portion of Cleaver's ending is a cause for concern, the following tweet highlighted the fact that a pastor lumped a reference to God in the context of three separate religions.

A final thought on Emanuel Cleaver's prayer. So many are talking about his amen and awoman end, yet I've seen few mention the fact a METHODIST pastor literally said, "We pray to the monotheistic god Brahma and god known by many names by many different faiths."

– Cullen Bridges (@CullenBridges) January 4, 2021

As one Twitter user puts it: “That’s problematic.”

According to Mark Tooley, president and editor of The Institute on Religion and Democracy’s journal, *Providence*, “It is likely unique to Western liberal Protestants to strive for faux inclusivity in public spirituality.”

He continues with a noteworthy commentary on the unusual nature of these pairings, “Jewish rabbis are not expected to pray to Christ. Imams are not expected to address the Trinity. Hindus probably won’t offer prayers to the heavenly Father. A Methodist cleric should feel no need to pray to any Hindu deity, which likely no Hindu would expect.”

In what was otherwise a conventional prayer filled with references to the Old Testament passage of Numbers 6:24-26, this tidbit seems to be lost in the commentary over Cleaver’s, “amen and a-woman” conclusion. While “amen” is used by those of Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths, the references to God as Brahma—a four-faced Hindu deity—does not correlate.

While some may argue for the separation of church and state, or even allude to the poorly presented joke that Cleaver may have been making in his “word play,” Tooley remarks that such a divided prayer does, in fact, matter to God: “God wants America to do better. This message is central to American identity, purpose and endurance.”

View Cleaver’s full prayer [here](#).