# Women and the Church

Christian Reflection
A SERIES IN FAITH AND ETHICS

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These five study guides integrate Bible study, prayer, worship, and reflection on themes in the *Women and the Church* issue.

### Recovering Discarded Images

Scripture's feminine metaphors for God yield a more dynamic understanding of divine nature and remind us that women as well as men are capable of bearing God's image in the world. Embracing these images in worship helps us to engage with God's gracious, multifaceted invitation to us.

### Female Preaching in Early Nineteenth-Century America

In the Second Great Awakening more than one hundred women criss-crossed the country as itinerant preachers, holding meetings in barns, schools, or fields. They were the first group of women to speak publicly in America. As biblical feminists, they were caught between two worlds—too radical to be accepted by evangelicals, but too conservative to be accepted by women's rights activists. Why have virtually all of them been forgotten?

### Anne Dutton as a Spiritual Director

During the Evangelical Revival, laypeople and clergy enthusiastically turned to Anne Dutton for spiritual counsel. Perceived by readers as remarkably wise, loving, and sensitive to the Spirit, she shared insights on watchfulness for sin and the Christian journey toward joy.

### The Triumph of the Eye

In a society ever more determined by the visual appeal of things, men begin to desire women who conform to a certain shape and look perpetually young. Women, in turn, strive to conform to eye-driven male desire. How can we reshape imagination to prefer spiritual vision to mere sight?

### What Should We Say about Mary?

As Protestants show new interest in the mother of Christ, they often think they need to have something to say *about* Mary, rather than *to* her. Why not begin with the first words spoken both *to* and *about* Mary from God's own messenger, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28)? If we offer this as an address, rather than a theological proposition, we might begin to understand more fully what it means to honor Mary.

# Introduction

BY ROBERT B. KRUSCHWITZ

**Despite their Church's ambivalent attitude toward them over the centuries, women continue to be essential to the spiritual backbone and transformed mind of faithful communities, even those in which their leadership roles are circumscribed by their gender.**

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The "most fitting word" to describe the early Church's attitude toward women is "ambivalence," historian Elizabeth Clark has written. "Women were God's creation, his good gift to men—and the curse of the world. They were weak in both mind and character—and displayed dauntless courage, undertook prodigious feats of scholarship. Vain, deceitful, brimming with lust—they led men to Christ, fled sexual encounter, wavered not at the executioner's threats, adorned themselves with sackcloth and ashes."

Though cultural appreciation of women's contributions has increased immensely, especially during the last century, remnants of that ancient ambivalence still haunt Christians. Yet, women continue to be essential parts of the spiritual backbone and transformed mind of faithful communities, even those in which their leadership roles are circumscribed by their gender.

Properly valuing women as well as men as capable of bearing the image of God, Kristina LaCelle-Peterson says in *Recovering Discarded Images* (p. 11), goes hand in hand with appreciating the feminine metaphors for God in Scripture. "Since God is, in fact, referred to with female imagery in various biblical texts," she writes, "the question is not whether using female images for God will draw us away from orthodox Christianity, but whether using exclusively male metaphors will so distort our view of God as to render our concept of God unbiblical." She concludes with wise guidance for incorporating the biblical feminine images for God in prayer and worship.

Over one hundred itinerant women preachers led Second Great Awakening revivals across America—from the well-known Harriet Livermore who preached to Congress, to the African Methodist Zilpha Elaw who

courageously evangelized slaves in Virginia and Maryland. Why did they suddenly flourish among new evangelical groups, and why were they as quickly forgotten? "They were the first group of women to speak publicly in America," Catherine Brekus explains in *Female Preaching in Early Nineteenth-Century America* (p. 20). Yet these biblical feminists "were caught between two worlds. They were too radical to be accepted by evangelicals, but too conservative to be accepted by women's rights activists."

Laypeople and clergy in eighteenth-century Britain enthusiastically turned to letters and tracts by Anne Dutton for spiritual counsel "remarkably wise, loving, and sensitive to the Spirit," Michael Sciretti reminds us in *Anne Dutton as a Spiritual Director* (p. 30). He commends her writings for their insight on watchfulness for sin and the Christian journey toward joy.

In *Mary and the Women from Galilee* (p. 50), Heidi Hornik explores Giotto's remarkable program of frescoes that detail the role of the Virgin Mary in the life of Christ. For *Lamentation* (detail on the cover), the artist "created a new type of pictorial space" that pushes "the entire narrative into the frontal plane, directly confronting the viewer with the monumentality and emotion" of Mary and the other women's grieving over the body of Jesus. In *Flight into Egypt*, Giotto uses monumental rock forms and positioning of figures to accentuate Mary's role in caring for the infant Jesus.

Carole Baker recalls her great aunt, who is also a Protestant, once asked her, "Why did Protestants get rid of Mary?" Baker says, "My silence and befuddlement marked the beginning of what has now become a longstanding fascination with Mary's role in the Christian Church." In *What Should We Say about Mary?* (p. 88), she reviews books on the resurgent interest among Protestants in the mother of our Lord—Scot McKnight's *The Real Mary: Why Evangelical Christians Can Embrace the Mother of Jesus*, Tim Perry's *Mary for Evangelicals: Toward an Understanding of the Mother of Our Lord*, and *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary*, edited by Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby. Concluding that Protestants worry too much about having something to say *about* Mary, rather than *to* her, Baker asks: "Why not begin with the first words spoken both *to* and *about* Mary from God's own messenger, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you' (Luke 1:28)? If we offer this as an address, rather than a theological proposition, we might begin to understand more fully what it means to honor Mary."

The worship service (p. 58) by Julie Merritt Lee invites us to praise God for the gifted women in the Church that we know through history and our experience, as well as for "those whose names and lives are forgotten." Her new hymn, "The Sacred Now" (p. 65), celebrates that as men and women "we are bound and yet we're free: / free to dream and free to cherish / Love that's borne of Trinity."

In a society ever more determined by the visual appeal of things, men desire women who conform to a certain shape and look perpetually young. Women, in turn, strive to conform to eye-driven male desire. Beginning

with C. S. Lewis's trenchant analysis of men's distorted gaze, Ralph Wood in *The Triumph of the Eye* (p. 37) uncovers theological resources for correcting our spiritual vision of true feminine beauty. He notes that almost all icons of the Virgin Mary in the Orthodox tradition "depict her with dark half-circles under her eyes" for these "signs of her suffering actually enhance her beauty." Indeed, she displays what the poet John Donne calls "autumnal beauty." Wood observes, "Creased with the care of both love and sorrow, it is a beauty that can finally behold even God face to face."

Emily Row Prevost in *Serving God, Not Men or Women* (p. 68) and Robbie Fox Castleman in *All Are One in Christ Jesus* (p. 72) reflect on their experience of God's call to ministry. Prevost recounts the difficulty of discerning "a calling from God while surrounded by people with the best of intentions" across the theological spectrum "who helped me get it wrong." Castleman wisely notes, "Like my brother, my gendered personhood in Christ matters." Yet, "Our equality in Christ Jesus is not a thing to be grasped at, fought over, proven and made the standard-bearer of our rights for women or for men—not if we are talking about the kingdom of God and our partnership in the gospel."

"While most Christians agree that women should be allowed to exercise their God-given gifts of ministry," Gretchen Ziegenhals writes in *Women in Ministry: Beyond the Impasse* (p. 77), there is still disagreement about whether some leadership roles are off limits to women. Complementarians believe men and women have different God-ordained roles, while egalitarians believe men and women have been equally gifted by God for all forms of service in the Church. "Both sides want to reach consensus," she notes, "but are unsure of how to bridge the gap." She reviews books in which evangelical scholars sift the scriptural and theological arguments for each viewpoint. In James R. Beck's *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, the four scholars who contribute point-counterpoint essays "maintain a lively balance between energetic debate, a history of obvious friendship, and a good-natured respect for one another's positions." *Women, Ministry and the Gospel: Exploring New Paradigms*, edited by Mark Husband and Timothy Larson, provides fresh perspectives from the social sciences and the humanities. Sarah Sumner's *Men and Women in the Church: Building Consensus on Christian Leadership*, takes a more personal approach in critiquing "norms within the Christian community [that] are more cultural than biblical."

"Acknowledging and listening carefully to the stories of conservative evangelical women as well as other Christian women might help move the conversation between egalitarians and complementarians beyond the impasse," Ziegenhals concludes. "But it needs to be the kind of listening that trusts that women's experiences can bring insight into our understanding of Scripture. Only such a fuller understanding that includes our lived experiences can help us see the loving and respectful relationships between women and men in the Church that God intends."

# Recovering Discarded Images

BY KRISTINA LACELLE-PETERSON

**Scripture's feminine metaphors for God yield a more dynamic understanding of divine nature and remind us that women as well as men are capable of bearing God's image in the world. Embracing these images in worship helps us to engage with God's gracious, multifaceted invitation to us.**

Once a student of mine read the "woe to you, you hypocrites" passage in Matthew 23:1-36 and declared emphatically, "The Jesus I believe in would never say such things!" Clearly he preferred his own picture of Jesus to the characterization of Jesus in Scripture. Many Christians function in the same way when it comes to female imagery for God: they prefer their comfortable, uncomplicated picture of God in exclusively male roles rather than the rich, multi-faceted depiction of God in Scripture.

Since God is, in fact, referred to with female imagery in various biblical texts, the question is not whether using female images for God will draw us away from orthodox Christianity, but whether using exclusively male metaphors will so distort our view of God as to render our concept of God unbiblical. Put simply: If we reject an entire class of biblical metaphors do we still have a biblical understanding of God? The answer seems to be "no" since in large sectors of the Church many Christians assume, either explicitly or implicitly, that God *is* male, despite the fact that Scripture depicts God as a spiritual being without the physicality on which sex is based.

In what follows we will examine some of the assumptions afoot in the Church about metaphors for God before we turn to scriptural texts in which the writers employ feminine imagery to refer to God. A recovery of these images in worship and Christian reflection can help us broaden our understanding of and deepen our engagement with God, as well as help us live out what we say we believe about women and men bearing the image of God.

## RICH DIVERSITY OF BIBLICAL IMAGES

Many Christians, especially in evangelical circles, speak of God exclusively with father language as if Scripture offered just this one picture of God. However, to ignore the rich diversity of images of God in Scripture not only leaves us with a partial picture of God but allows us too easily to assign our cultural assumptions about human fathers to God. In other words, we not only reduce God to one image, but we also reduce God to *our* image, our cultural ideals regarding male parents. This, of course, borders on idolatry.

Identification of God with our assumptions about fatherhood is especially misleading given the fact that the writers of the Old Testament use the father metaphor almost exclusively to refer to the nurturing activity of God who protects the orphan (Psalm 68:5), pities the weakness of the vulnerable (Psalm 103:13-14), and welcomes back the wayward child (Jeremiah 31:9). The father image is not used to denote authority and discipline, as many Christians assume, but rather points to the gentle, nurturing aspects of God.

In any case, the nearly exclusive use of father language makes it difficult to have discussions about the feminine imagery for God, but also makes it fearfully important. Since our language both displays and (in)forms how we think, if we refer to God only in male terms we show what we think of God and we also reinforce these concepts of God in our minds.

In contrast, the many metaphors for the Divine in Scripture give us a variety of ways to understand God and to draw close to God experientially. Metaphors have a didactic function, teaching about the abstract in terms of the concrete, and in the case of God, the unknown by use of the known and the infinite through the finite. But more than that, metaphors possess an affective aspect that goes beyond rational lessons about a given topic. As they draw on personal experience they produce an emotional response, so we experience one thing in terms of another.[1] The Psalmist, for instance, could say "God is strong and steady," but states the idea more powerfully in the metaphor "God is our shelter" that not only communicates characteristics about God but also beckons readers into a particular intimacy with God. The image invites those who have experienced life as unpredictable or out of control, to rest in the protective and enduring presence of God.

Given both the didactic and affective functions of metaphors, it is clear that no one metaphor will suffice when it comes to God and our relation-

ship with God. God's nature is too immense to be captured by one image and our disparate life situations too varied to be tapped by one metaphor. Graciously, God has offered us in Scripture a range of images, from inanimate objects or forces of nature (such as trees, the sun, water, rocks, shelter, wind, and fire) to animals (lion, mother bear, eagle, and dove), as well as people of varying roles (potter, warrior, ruler, gardener, and friend) and both genders (king, woman giving birth, master, mistress, father, and mother). If we were to take them literally, they would be nonsensical together—how can something be both an inanimate rock and a living dove, for instance, or a mother and a father?—but the clash is important to help us remember that they are all metaphors.[2] None was meant to stand alone. The focus on a single metaphor discussed above displays a misappropriation of that metaphor: worshipers confuse metaphor with reality and make absolute something that was meant to be illustrative.

Dealing with the diversity of metaphors for God demands careful thought in other ways as well. It does not make sense, for instance, to count how many times God is referred to as a rock and how many as wind to decide which one is more "true." Similarly, the preponderance of male imagery does not suggest that God is somehow more male or more rightfully depicted as male. In fact, the most theologically significant name for God in the Old Testament, *Yahweh*, I AM, emphasizes God's being, not a male identity. God is not pictured as a sexualized male deity akin to Ba'al or any of the other gods of the Ancient Near East who had female consorts with whom to procreate. Rather, the writers of the Old Testament material displayed God as male or female, and even, perhaps most surprisingly, as both, in a number of texts with gendered pairs of images. It is with examples of these texts that we will begin our survey of feminine imagery.

## FEMALE IMAGES FOR GOD IN SCRIPTURE

In some passages, Scripture employs male and female images for God in conjunction with one another, without using stereotypes of gender to give "opposite" or even complementary messages. Rather both images reinforce the same point. For instance, Isaiah 42:13 compares God to a warrior:

> he cries out, he shouts aloud,
> he shows himself mighty against his foes.

The very next verse states:

> For a long time I have held my peace,
> I have kept still and restrained myself;
> now I will cry out like a woman in labor,
> I will gasp and pant.
> I will lay waste mountains and hills…
>
> *Isaiah 42:14-15a*

The cry of a soldier in battle and the cry of a woman in childbirth function in a similar way to drive home God's distress at the people's unfaithfulness and warn of the imminent action God will take. The point is similar, but the disparate images invite men and women to identify with God's frustration.

In God's challenge in Job 38, God asks Job where he was during the creation of the cosmos. A pair of masculine and feminine poetic images point to creation:

> Has the rain a father,
> or who has begotten the drops of dew?
> From whose womb did the ice come forth,
> and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven?
>
> *Job 38:28-29*

The writer pictures God as the one who begets and the one who births, neither of which is literally true, a fact underscored by their back to back usage. Yahweh, the fullness of being, can be metaphorically portrayed by both types of human biology, though possessing neither. Interestingly, birth imagery is not off-limits; the writer does not hold to the modern notion that maternal imagery in religious circles is inherently pagan, or more likely to lead to paganism, and should be avoided on that basis.[3]

Jesus also taught through the use of pairs of gendered images, most notably in Luke 15:1-10 where God is both the shepherd looking for lost sheep and the woman looking for the lost coin. Obviously the message in both parables is that God persistently seeks the lost, so the shepherd seeking the lost lamb and the woman seeking the lost coin do not say different things about God. Rather, the images address different sectors of the audience: men who have looked for an economically essential lost lamb and women who have searched for a coin that was their security should anything happen to a husband, are being invited to draw on their experience to understand the urgency with which God seeks for the lost.

Another pair of gendered roles in Jesus' teaching represents God as the farmer who plants the mustard seed and God as the woman working yeast into lump of dough (Luke 13:18-21//Matthew 13:31-33). These traditional activities of men and women describe the growth of the kingdom of God: the kingdom is like seed that grows after the sower has done his work and the kingdom is like yeast that expands throughout the dough after the baker has done her work. A man's work and a woman's work point to the activity of Jesus as the agent of the kingdom. (The baking imagery also lies close behind his teaching in John 6:31-59: God gave manna in the wilderness and now gives the living bread, Jesus himself.)

Some female metaphors, however, are not paired directly in the text with male imagery. In some passages womb and birth imagery stand alone. In Job 38, again, we find these verses:

> Or who shut in the sea with doors
> when it burst out from the womb?—
> when I made the clouds its garment,
> and thick darkness its swaddling band….
>
> *Job 38:8-9*

God births and clothes the sea. In Deuteronomy, as Moses reviewed Israelite history before entering the Promised Land, he observes of the people:

> You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you;
> you forgot the God who gave you birth.
>
> *Deuteronomy 32:18*

Moses characterizes God's formation of the nation of Israel as giving birth. The Psalmist compares his contentment with God to a child with its mother:

> But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
> like a weaned child with its mother;
> my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.
>
> *Psalm 131:2*

In a similar vein, God's faithfulness is compared with that of a nursing mother:

> Can a woman forget her nursing child,
> or show no compassion for the child of her womb?
> Even these she may forget,
> yet I will not forget you.
>
> *Isaiah 49:15*

God, like the mother of a young child, never forgets the people in their weakness and helplessness. In Isaiah's final chapter, God promises to act like a comforting mother:

> For thus says the LORD: ...
> As a mother comforts her child,
> so I will comfort you.
>
> *Isaiah 66:12a, 13a*

Finally, Hosea depicts the nation of Israel as a wayward son who had forgotten the tenderness with which God led them out of Egypt.

> Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
> I took them up in my arms;
> but they did not know that I healed them.
> I led them with cords of human kindness,
> with bands of love.
> I was to them like those

who lift infants to their cheeks.
I bent down to them and fed them.

*Hosea 11:3-4*

Interestingly, the Hebrew words for womb and breast are related to words used of God. The word for womb, *racham*, when used as a verb *rechem* means to be compassionate or to have pity. God shows womb-like compassion on the people of Israel. Further, the word for breast, *shad*, forms one of the names for God: El Shaddai. This term traditionally has been translated as God Almighty, though the term literally means God with breasts and occurs in conjunction with fertility blessings. (See, for example, Genesis 17:1-2 in which God calls Abram and promises a multitude of offspring.) The Old Testament writers seem less squeamish than modern readers about linking images of female reproduction and God.[4]

In the New Testament we have birth imagery employed again, most memorably by Jesus in his conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:3-10). You must be born again, or born from above, Jesus declares using metaphorical language that Nicodemus tries to understand literally. "Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" he asks, showing his inability to embrace the message and the metaphor. Jesus elaborates, naming the Spirit as the one who gives new birth. Later New Testament writers name God as the one who gave the believers birth or new birth (see James 1:18 and 1 Peter 1:3). It is ironic that in our era the people most comfortable calling themselves "born again" Christians are most opposed to picturing God as the mother who birthed them, the one who gave this born again experience.

By comparing Christian growth to nursing, 1 Peter 2:2-3 extends the maternal metaphor first used in the Old Testament and reaffirmed by Jesus: "Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good." Birth and nursing imagery, rather than being embarrassing or beneath God in some way, were worthy comparisons to emphasize the intimacy of God's connection to and care for us.

Jesus also uses maternal imagery to express the desolation he feels for Jerusalem just before his death. As he stands outside the city looking back over it he weeps and cries out: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem…. How often I have desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Luke 13:34). This presents another tender, protecting, maternal image of God in the person of Jesus.

One of the important implications of thinking about these images of God as mother is the possibility it opens for us in how we learn about God. In other words, many of us have been taught to think about what God must be like from looking at the ways our fathers interacted with us, or from looking at how they failed, and understanding God in contrast to their lack.

If we recognize that God is also like a mother to us, then we can look at our mothers and learn about God's character from them. We can and should ask: what do we see about God from our mother's care for us? Conversely, if we never look to mothers to learn about God, it suggests that we deem mothers and mothers' love less capable of pointing to God, and therefore inherently worth less than fathers and fathering love. This belies our own theology that affirms we are equally created in the image of God and then equally fallen and equally redeemed to bear the image of Christ.[5]

Feminine imagery for God is not limited to motherhood, however. The Psalmist depicts God as a midwife:

> Yet it was you who took me from the womb;
> you kept me safe on my mother's breast.
>
> *Psalm 22:9*

Here God receives honor as a skilled woman in a potentially perilous setting. Elsewhere the Psalmist evokes the anticipation of a servant toward a master and mistress:

> As the eyes of servants
> look to the hand of their master,
> as the eyes of a maid
> to the hand of her mistress,
> so our eyes look to the LORD our God….
>
> *Psalm 123:2*

Finally, there is the literary echo between Wisdom in Proverbs 8 and the Logos in John 1. In the Proverbs passage, the writer personifies wisdom (*hokma* in Hebrew and *sophia* in Greek) as a woman who speaks truth and righteousness, who is valued above anything humans can desire and who, existing before creation, assisted God with it. John alludes to this wisdom passage in his discussion of the Logos in John 1, affirming the Logos' pre-existence and agency in creation. Though the two are not identical—Wisdom is described as created by God whereas the Logos *is* God, and Wisdom assists God with creation while the Logos brings it about—nevertheless, the literary connection is intriguing and may call into question the assumption of Jesus' pre-existent maleness.

## USING FEMALE IMAGES FOR GOD IN WORSHIP

Given the numerous female images for God in Scripture, it would seem appropriate to use both feminine and masculine language for God in prayer and worship. However, in many Christian communities the practice would have to be introduced gradually in order for feminine imagery to aid in worship rather than detract from it. To start, we can address God in worship with gender-neutral terms (such as Gracious God or Loving Savior) and avoid the heavy use of masculine pronouns, to move people away from conceiving of God as male. Sermons and other Christian instruction should

include the metaphorical pictures from Scripture of God as female so that worshipers know that this is a biblical approach to God (and not the invention of the feminist movement as students have told me it is). Finally, in liturgy, prayer, and song, worshipers can be led to address God with all the rich variety Scripture has taught us.[6]

However, some people will resist on a number of different grounds, a few of which will be addressed here. Some people assume that since Jesus was a male human being God must be gendered, and, of course, male. However, the maleness of Jesus does not suggest that the Trinity is male any more than the humanity of Jesus makes the Godhead human. Obviously to enter into the human race God had to adopt biological sex, not to mention a particular skin color, eye color, height, and so on. None of these things are characteristics of the whole Trinity, but of the divine-human Savior who came among us. Furthermore, the maleness of Jesus is not salvifically significant: in other words, it is not the maleness of Jesus that saves, but God entering into human flesh. As the early Church affirmed, only that which has been incarnated can be redeemed.

**In liturgy, prayer, and song, worshipers can be led to address God with all the rich variety of feminine and masculine imagery Scripture has taught us.**

Another objection to feminine language for God resides in a fear for Trinitarian formulations. The creedal affirmation of the Trinity is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but clearly this is not necessarily the only way we should think about or refer to God. The New Testament writers did not necessarily resort to “Father” even in Trinitarian passages: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you” (2 Corinthians 13:13). Furthermore, each member of the Trinity is sometimes referred to in feminine imagery or language: the Creator gives birth to the seas in Job 38; God gives manna in Exodus 16 and Bread of Life in John 6. Jesus compares his impulse to protect and sustain Jerusalem to a mother hen protecting her young and he teaches that the Spirit can give Nicodemus a new birth (in Hebrew the word for Spirit is a feminine noun).

Others suggest that since Jesus taught us to pray “Our Father,” we must use those words whenever we address God. However, Jesus, himself referred to God in other ways in the Gospel accounts, the later New Testament writers used a variety of names for God, and in the eleven prayers recorded in the New Testament outside the Gospels, God is never addressed as “Father.”[7] Furthermore, if we believe that Christians can pray using their own phrases of thanksgiving and petition rather than adhering to the

language of the Lord's Prayer, then surely we are not bound to begin every prayer "Our Father."

The use of feminine images for God calls into question our conceptions of a male God, a God hemmed in by human biological characteristics. God the Almighty is the one whose ways are higher than our ways, as the heavens are higher than the earth, Isaiah tells us (55:8-9). When writers of Scripture compare God to human beings, they emphasize the personhood of God, the fact that God is a relational being with whom we can enter into a real relationship. But all of our metaphors finally fall short because God, though an eminently personal Being, is not merely a human being.

In the end, using feminine metaphors for God is important for our theology, to give us a much more dynamic understanding of God's nature. Feminine imagery would also serve as a reminder that women as well as men are capable of bearing God's image in this world. Finally, embracing feminine and masculine imagery would be good for our doxology, helping us engage with the gracious, multifaceted invitation of God to us.[8]

**NOTES**

1 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 5.

2 Brian Wren, *What Language Shall I Borrow?* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 132.

3 See, for instance, Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Why God is Not Mother," *Christianity Today*, 37:9 (August 16, 1993), 16-23.

4 Paul Smith, *Is It OK to Call God "Mother"? Considering the Feminine Face of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 56-58 and 67.

5 Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 75.

6 For helpful guidance, see Brian Wren's *What Language Shall I Borrow*? and Paul Smith's *Is It OK to Call God "Mother"?* cited above, and Ronald Witherup, *A Liturgist's Guide to Inclusive Language* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996).

7 Smith observes that "Father" occurs only once in twenty times New Testament writers refer to God (*Is It OK*, 82-83).

8 I discuss the issues in this article in further detail in *Liberating Tradition: Women's Identity and Vocation in Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

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# Female Preaching in Early Nineteenth-Century America

BY CATHERINE A. BREKUS

**In the Second Great Awakening more than one hundred women crisscrossed the country as itinerant preachers, holding meetings in barns, schools, or outside in fields. They were the first group of women to speak publicly in America. Why have virtually all of them been forgotten?**

Some argued that she was "bold and shameless," a disgrace to her family and to the evangelical movement. Others insisted that she was the "instrument of God," a humble woman who had given up everything for Christ.

Few women in early nineteenth-century America provoked more admiration, criticism, and controversy than Harriet Livermore. She was the daughter of a congressman and the grand-daughter of a senator, but after an emotional conversion experience, she renounced her privileged life in order to become a female preacher. Reputed to be a gifted evangelist who was also a beautiful singer, she became so popular that she was allowed to preach in front of Congress four times between 1827 and 1844, each time to huge crowds. According to a Washington newspaper, more than a thousand people assembled in the Hall of Representatives to hear her preach in 1827, and hundreds more gathered outside to catch a glimpse of her. President John Quincy Adams had to sit on the steps leading up to her feet because he could not find a free chair.

Harriet Livermore was the best-known female preacher of her day, but she was part of a larger community of evangelical women, both white and African-American, who claimed to have been divinely inspired to preach

the gospel. Between 1790 and 1845, during the revivals that historians have identified as the "Second Great Awakening," more than one hundred women crisscrossed the country as itinerant preachers. Holding meetings in barns, schools, or outside in fields when they were barred from churches, they were the first group of women to speak publicly in America.[1]

Despite their fame in the early nineteenth century, virtually all of these remarkable women have been forgotten. Who were they? Why did some evangelical churches welcome them into the pulpit? And why have they disappeared from historical memory?

Harriet Livermore was raised in an affluent family, but most female preachers belonged to the lower or lower-middling classes, and few had been formally educated. Quoting a passage from the Gospel of Matthew, "So the last shall be first, and the first last," they claimed that God had called them to proclaim the gospel despite their poverty, their lack of education, and their sex (Matthew 20:16). All of them insisted that they had not wanted to take up the "cross" of preaching, but when they had tried to deny their calls, God had overcome their fears by promising to guide and protect them. Portraying themselves as "instruments" of God, "pens in his hand," or "clay in the hands of the potter," they claimed that he had made the same promise to them that he had once made to the prophet Jeremiah: "Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth" (Jeremiah 1:9, KJV). They insisted that when they stood in the pulpit, they did not speak their own words, but God's.

Most Protestant churches in the early nineteenth century opposed female preaching on the grounds that it violated the Pauline injunction to "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law" (1 Corinthians 14:34-35, KJV). They also cited two other Pauline texts: "the head of the woman is the man" (1 Corinthians 11:3b, KJV), and "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (1 Timothy 2:11-12, KJV). As the General Assembly of the Presbyterians declared in 1832, "to teach and exhort, or to lead in prayer, in public and promiscuous assemblies, is clearly forbidden to women in the Holy Oracles."[2] In the nineteenth century, the word "promiscuous" was often used to describe mixed audiences of men and women, but the word also suggested sexual immorality and licentiousness. Many ministers argued that Christian women who invited men to stare at them in public, even to proclaim the gospel, were no better than prostitutes. Although women could teach Sunday School, serve as foreign missionaries, and even exhort others to repent, they could not violate the rules of female modesty—or usurp male authority—by standing in the masculine space of the pulpit.

Yet even though the largest, most influential churches in the early nineteenth century forbade women to preach, particularly the Congregationalists, the Presbyterians, and the Episcopalians, a small number of new, dissenting sects challenged the restrictions on women's religious speech. After the First Amendment declared that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion," state legislatures disestablished the colonial churches, stripping them of the power to collect taxes for their support. (Before the American Revolution, almost every state had an established church that was financially supported by the government.) In this new, free marketplace of religion, churches had to rely on persuasion rather than coercion to attract members, and the formerly established churches faced stiff competition from upstart religious groups who had been inspired by the populist rhetoric of the American Revolution. Anti-authoritarian, anti-intellectual, and often visionary, they deliberately set themselves apart from the "worldliness" of established churches by insisting that God could choose anyone—even the poor, uneducated, enslaved, or female—to spread the gospel. Nothing better symbolized their countercultural identity than their willingness to allow large numbers of women into the pulpit.

**Nothing better symbolized the countercultural identity of the new evangelicals—the Freewill Baptists, Christian Connection, northern Methodists, African Methodists, and Millerites—than their willingness to allow large numbers of women into the pulpit.**

The evangelicals that allowed women to preach—the Freewill Baptists, the Christian Connection, the northern Methodists, the African Methodists, and the Millerites (the predecessors of the Seventh-day Adventists)—were motivated by both practical and theological considerations. On the practical level, all of these sects lacked enough male ministers to keep pace with their spectacular growth in the early nineteenth century, and desperate for help, they relied on women as well as men to lead meetings and to organize new churches. They also found it difficult to control what happened during emotional camp meetings, where converts often cried out for mercy, begged God for forgiveness, and even fainted to the ground. In one of the most famous camp meetings in American history, held in Cane Ridge, Kentucky in 1801, converts not only swooned and "jerked" uncontrollably, but even growled and barked like dogs. In this tumultuous atmosphere, anything seemed possible—even female preaching.

These sects also supported female preaching for deeper theological reasons. They believed that religious authority came from heartfelt religious

experience, not from formal education, and they feared that established churches had “quenched the spirit” by requiring ministers to be college-educated. Insisting that ordinary people could read and interpret the Bible for themselves, they argued that a farmer or a blacksmith could be as much of a biblical expert as a Harvard-educated minister. In addition, because of their conviction that God could communicate directly with people through dreams, visions, and voices, they argued that it was possible for God to inspire women as well as men to proclaim the gospel. Education, wealth, social position, gender—all of these were meaningless to God.

Since many members of these sects feared that the apocalypse might be imminent, they also sanctioned female preaching as a sign of the approaching millennium. According to the Millerites—who took their name from William Miller (1782-1849), a farmer who became famous for his millennial predictions—the world was destined to end in 1844. Disdaining the faith in human progress, they believed that they were living at the end of human history, and they urged every convert, whether male or female, to spread the gospel before it was too late. Influenced by Joel’s promise that at the end of the world, “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy” (Joel 2:28), they invested female preaching with transcendent significance. Whenever a woman stood in the pulpit, she was a visible reminder that Christ might soon return to earth.

Evangelicals not only cited Joel’s words, but many other biblical texts that authorized female preaching. When they read the Bible for themselves, they discovered that instead of keeping silence, biblical heroines like Mary Magdalene, Philip’s four daughters, Priscilla, and Phoebe (or “Phebe” in the KJV) had spread the good news of Christ’s resurrection as witnesses and evangelists. According to Rebecca Miller, for example, a popular preacher for the Christian Connection, Phoebe had been the first recorded female preacher. Despite Paul’s description of her as a “servant” of the church, she had not been simply a maid or a housekeeper, but an evangelist (Romans 16:1). Quoting other passages in the Bible, she illustrated that the word “servant” was typically used in the Bible as a synonym for minister. Miller also argued that Paul’s warning to “keep silence in the churches” had been directed only at the disorderly women of Corinth, not at all Christian women. Pointing out the inconsistencies in his words, she argued that if he had meant to forbid female preaching, he would not have also instructed women to cover their heads when “praying or prophesying” in public (1 Corinthians 11:5).[3]

Women like Rebecca Miller caused controversy because of their spirited defense of female evangelism, but they also became immensely popular within their own sects. Abigail Roberts, for example, a well-known

Christian Connection preacher, often spoke outdoors because such throngs of people gathered to hear her sermons. Although it seems likely that some of her listeners were attracted by the sheer novelty of seeing a woman in the pulpit, others reported being genuinely moved by her passionate, heartfelt sermons. “Many thousands have listened with breathless attention to the heavenly story, as it fell from her lips,” a male minister wrote, “and many hundreds will date their religious experience from the time they heard her preach.”[4]

Since female preachers prided themselves on speaking extemporaneously, we do not have any copies of their sermons, but based on newspaper reports, spectators’ accounts, and their own letters and memoirs, we know that they usually preached on the traditional evangelical themes of repentance, conversion, and salvation. Indeed, a favorite text was “Ye must be born again” (John 3:3). Although some of their listeners may have expected them to preach a distinctly “feminine” or sentimental message (the early nineteenth century was the great age of the sentimental novel), they mixed soothing words of comfort with fiery warnings to repent. On one hand, they were particularly attracted to biblical passages that described God as a mother as well as a father, and they insisted that women, like men, had been created in the image of God. Salome Lincoln, for example, a Freewill Baptist, preached on a passage from Deuteronomy that describes God as an eagle who “stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings” (Deuteronomy 32:11-12, KJV).[5] On the other hand, female preachers did not hesitate to portray God as angry, vengeful, and all-powerful. During a devastating cholera epidemic in 1832, Nancy Towle preached a hellfire sermon on a text from Ezekiel, “Go ye after him through the city and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women” (Ezekiel 9:5b-6a, KJV). According to her memoir, her listeners responded by crying out in fear.[6]

By the very fact of speaking in public, female preachers appeared dangerously radical, but they shared little with the women who supported the early women’s rights movement. With the notable exception of Sojourner Truth, who was both a feminist and an abolitionist, none of them participated in the first Woman’s Rights Convention at Seneca Falls in 1848. Although they used the Bible to defend their essential dignity and humanity, they did not challenge the fundamental sexual inequalities within their churches. Even Zilpha Elaw, an African Methodist who disobeyed her husband’s commands to stop preaching, claimed that her act of defiance was justified only because of her marriage to an “unbeliever.” In general, as she explained, “Woman is dependent on and subject to man. Man is not created for the woman, but the woman for the man.”[7] Most female preachers were single when they began their careers, and those who decided to marry usually left

the pulpit unless their husbands supported them. (Several female preachers married clergymen who encouraged them to serve as "helpmates" in their ministry.)

Influenced by a culture that did not allow women to vote, hold political office, or own their own property if they were married, female preachers found it difficult to imagine that God wanted them to be the full equals of men. Insisting that they were not "radicals" or "jezebels," they denied that they wanted to subvert male authority in either the home or the church. As "biblical" rather than secular feminists, they based their defense of female preaching on biblical revelation rather than natural rights, and most did not believe that the Bible sanctioned women's political, legal, or economic equality to men. (Women's rights activists like Sarah Grimke and her sister Angelina vehemently disagreed.) Even though they brought hundreds of new converts into evangelical churches, they never asked for permission to baptize them or to give them the Lord's Supper. Nor did they broach the forbidden topic of women's ordination. Deborah Peirce, a Christian Connection preacher, published an entire book defending women's right to "spread the good news of salvation," but she also argued that only men had the right to "rule and go forward."[8]

Without the authority of ordination, female preachers served as itinerants rather than as settled pastors. Like male circuit riders, they traveled by horseback, stagecoach, or on foot to small towns and rural villages across the country, with some even sailing across the Atlantic Ocean to preach in England and Ireland. Three African-American women—Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Elizabeth (whose last name is unknown)—courageously traveled to Virginia and Maryland in order to evangelize slaves. Although none of them were physically harmed, they could have been whipped, imprisoned, or even enslaved. Since most southern states allowed free blacks to be sold into slavery if they did not have legal certificates proving their status, these women knew that they literally risked their freedom by traveling to the South, but they felt called to "proclaim liberty to the captives" (Isaiah 61:1).

**By the very fact of speaking in public, female preachers appeared dangerously radical, but they shared little with the women who supported the early women's rights movement.**

Female preachers made many sacrifices for their faith. Because they were not paid even the meager salaries of men, they depended on the generosity of their audiences to pay their expenses, but many were so poor that they had to resort to sewing, housecleaning, or washing clothes to make

*FEMALE PREACHERS*

*Clockwise from top left: Harriett Livermore (1788-1868), Salome Lincoln (1807-1841), Abigail Roberts (1791-1841).*

ends meet. They also endured constant criticism and harassment. They were locked out of meetinghouses, booed by angry spectators, labeled as shrews or prostitutes, and even physically threatened. Because African-American female preachers challenged racial as well as sexual stereotypes, they faced even greater hostility than white women, and on one particularly frightening occasion, Zilpha Elaw preached in front of a group of angry white men who stood listening to her with their hands full of stones. If not for her confidence in God's protection, she never would have found the courage to keep preaching.

Female preachers found it difficult to cope with the hostility and aggression that they faced from their opponents, but they were far more troubled by the shifting tide of opinion within their own sects during the 1830s and 1840s. As the Freewill Baptists, Christian Connection, Methodists, and African Methodists grew larger and more powerful, they deliberately turned away from the radicalism that had marked their early histories. In the early nineteenth century, most of the members of these sects had been poor farmers, laborers, and artisans, but inspired by the Protestant work ethic, they worked hard, saved their money, and tried to build a better future for their children. The transformation happened gradually over the course of more than forty years, but by the 1830s and 1840s, these small, persecuted sects had grown into flourishing denominations. They built seminaries to educate young men for the ministry, discouraged visionary "enthusiasm," urged converts to behave with greater restraint at camp meetings, toned down their millennial language, and perhaps not surprisingly, abandoned their earlier support for female preaching. In their early years they had protested against the established churches, but by the 1840s they had *become* the establishment. By 1844, for example, the Methodists had become the largest single denomination in the United States, numbering more than one million members.

During the 1830s and 1840s female preachers faced growing restrictions on their speech. Many churches that had once been open to them were now closed, and male ministers urged them to find other ways to serve God. In a dramatic church trial in Cherry Valley, New York in 1830, the Methodist hierarchy excommunicated Sally Thompson when she refused to stop holding meetings. They did not even allow her to testify in her own defense.[9]

Female preachers were not only excluded from the pulpit, but from the pages of church record books and clerical memoirs. Embarrassed by their early support of female preaching, many evangelicals deliberately tried to erase these women from historical memory. For example, when David Marks published the first edition of his memoir in 1831, he mentioned meeting some of the most popular female preachers of his time, including Susan

Humes, Clarissa Danforth, Almira Bullock, Dolly Quinby, and "Sister" Wiard. Yet in 1846, when his wife, Marilla, published a posthumous edition of his memoirs, she removed all the references—no matter how small—to the women her husband had once defended. Because she wanted to protect her dead husband's reputation, she presented a new, sanitized version of his career—one in which female preachers simply did not exist.[10] By the late nineteenth century, these women had been almost completely forgotten by their own denominations. If not for manuscript church records, early nineteenth-century religious periodicals, and their own memoirs, we would know almost nothing about their remarkable lives.

If female preachers had allied themselves with women's rights activists, they might have been remembered by the liberal reformers who demanded women's full political, economic, and legal equality to men. But sadly, the two groups of women saw little in each other to admire. On one hand, female preachers did not want to be associated with controversial women like Fanny Wright, a well-known platform speaker in the 1820s and 1830s who was christened the "Red Harlot of Infidelity" because of her advocacy of women's rights, divorce, and birth control. On the other hand, women's rights activists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were equally reluctant to claim "sisterhood" with evangelical women. Although feminists often used religious rhetoric to defend female equality, they condemned the institutional church for standing in the way of women's progress. Deeply frustrated by evangelicals' biblical conservatism, they could not understand why female preachers did not devote their lives to the cause of women's rights.

Despite their popularity in the early nineteenth century, female preachers were eventually forgotten because no one wanted to preserve their memory. As biblical feminists, they were caught between two worlds. Revolutionary in their defense of female preaching, yet traditional in their theology, they had been too radical to be accepted by evangelicals, but too conservative to be accepted by women's rights activists. Scorned by the two communities that might have embraced them, they disappeared into the silence of the past.

As if she knew that she would be forgotten one day, Harriet Livermore described herself as a "stranger and a pilgrim," an outsider in a culture that failed to recognize women as the religious equals of men. "These all died in faith," the Apostle Paul wrote about Noah, Abraham, and Sarah, "not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13, KJV). Although Livermore never lost her faith that she and other evangelical women would someday "receive the

promises," she also knew that the Christian life was filled with sacrifice and suffering. In 1868, at the age of eighty, she died alone and penniless in an almshouse in Pennsylvania, and in accordance with her wishes, she was buried in an unmarked grave.

Harriet Livermore and scores of other evangelical women in the early nineteenth century devoted their lives to creating a lasting tradition of female preaching, but tragically, they failed. Yet even though they were eventually forgotten by their denominations, their lives bear eloquent testimony to their faith in God. Despite ridicule, harassment, and their own fears of appearing radical or "unfeminine," they devoted their lives to proclaiming God's grace. Someday, they prayed, female preachers would no longer feel like "strangers and pilgrims" in the evangelical churches that had inspired them.

## NOTES

1 For more on Harriet Livermore and other female preachers, see Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

2 *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (1832), 378.

3 Rebecca Miller, "Duty of Females," *Christian Palladium* 10, no. 2 (May 15, 1841), 21-22, and Rebecca Miller, "Female Improvement," *Christian Palladium* 10, no. 3 (June 1, 1841), 35-36.

4 *Christian Palladium* 10, no. 9 (September 1, 1841), 144.

5 Almond H. Davis, *The Female Preacher, or Memoir of Salome Lincoln* (Providence, 1843; reprinted New York: Arno Press, 1972), 65.

6 Nancy Towle, *Vicissitudes Illustrated, in the Experience of Nancy Towle, in Europe and America*, second edition (Portsmouth, NH: John Caldwell, 1833), 186, 225.

7 Zilpha Elaw, *Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels and Labours of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw* (1846), reprinted in *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, edited by William L. Andrews (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 61-62.

8 Deborah Peirce, *A Scriptural Vindication of Female Preaching* (Carmel, NY: E. Burroughs, 1820), 13.

9 Sally Thompson, *Trial and Defence of Mrs. Sally Thompson, On a Complaint of Insubordination to the Rules of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Evil Speaking and Immorality* (West Troy, NY: W. Hollands, 1857).

10 Compare David Marks, *The Life of David Marks* (Limerick, ME: Morning Star Office, 1831), 291, to Marilla Marks, *Memoirs of the Life of David Marks, Minister of the Gospel* (Dover, NH: William Burr, 1846), 202.

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# Anne Dutton as a Spiritual Director

BY MICHAEL SCIRETTI

**During the Evangelical Revival, laypeople and clergy enthusiastically turned to Anne Dutton for spiritual counsel. Perceived by readers as remarkably wise, loving, and sensitive to the Spirit, she shared insights on watchfulness for sin and the Christian journey toward joy.**

During the early years of the great Evangelical Revival in eighteenth-century Britain, both laypeople and leading clergy enthusiastically turned to the letters of Anne Dutton (1692-1765) for their spiritual depth and counsel. Perceived by her readers to be remarkably experienced and wise, loving and sensitive to the Spirit, Dutton was generous with her spiritual direction: "Fear not *troubling me*, my dear Brother, with *your Complaints*, nor that any of the dear Children of God should do so," she wrote to Reverend Jonathan Barber. "It is our Privilege, a Part of the Communion of Saints, to unbosom our Souls to each other, to bear each other's Burdens, to see each other's Good, to rejoice with them that rejoice, and to mourn with them that mourn. The more *free* you are with me, the more *kindly* I take it, the more my Spirit runs into yours, and interests itself in your Concerns. God grant me a Bosom large enough, to embrace all his Children, and to receive all their Cases with the greatest Sympathy!"[1]

As one of the earliest Calvinistic Baptists to support the burgeoning revival, Dutton held correspondence with men and women not only in her native England, but also in Wales, Holland, Scotland, and the American colonies. Howell Harris (1714-1773), leader of the Methodist revival in Wales, initiated a correspondence with her in the late 1730s. She exchanged

letters with the innovative Anglican preacher, George Whitefield (1714-1770), and encouraged his ministry in the early 1740s. Whitefield, in turn, promoted her publications in *The Weekly History*, the original evangelical magazine edited by John Lewis (d. 1755), who became a long-time correspondent and spiritual friend of Dutton's.

In 1740, she published the first volume of her *Letters on Spiritual Subjects*, which would reach twenty-two volumes of counsel, encouragement, and direction to various family members, friends, ministers, and religious communities. During her lifetime over fifty of her books appeared in print. In these she offered spiritual counsel to specific individuals (or, on occasion, congregations) who were uncertain about their salvation, worried about their progress in their faith, distressed over afflictions in their lives, or confused about specific doctrinal matters.

In the face of great resistance to a woman writing to guide others (although she was completely supported by her husband who was a Baptist pastor), Dutton defended her ministry of private teaching and writing letters of encouragement. She considered herself a "private Christian" called to a "public Work" to "preach CHRIST and his Truths…both doctrinally and practically before all."[2] On the title page of each collection of her letters, she included the Apostle Paul's instruction: "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

I am drawn to Anne Dutton's spiritual theology because, though it echoes the language of previous Christian mystics, it is always mediated by the words and images of Scripture. She had heightened experiences of the sacred, including a "sealing in the Spirit" two years after her conversion that led her to faithful trust in divine love rather than anxious fear of the unknown. Faced with constant illness, frailty of body, and death—she lost her first husband at age twenty-seven and her second husband at fifty-five—Dutton surrendered herself into "Mercy's Ocean," trusting that God had taken the "curse" out of all her tragedies and would use such crises of faith to "exercise [her] graces" and conform her to Christ. While she believed the Triune God was known most acutely in Jesus Christ, she attested one could experience communion with each divine person. Through rich images of God as an "Ocean of Love," the Son as the "Royal Bridegroom," and the Spirit as "Comforter," she reached language's limit to describe her mystical experience of being enveloped in divine love.[3] In her spiritual direction, Dutton shared the knowledge that such mystical experience (with the aid of Baptist communities of interpretation) had taught her.

## GIVING DIRECTION IN THE FAMILY

While other spiritual directors have variously conceived their role as being the master to a disciple, parent to a child, or spiritual friend to a friend, Dutton's model of spiritual direction was grounded in her egalitarian interpretation of the Church as the body of Christ and the family of God.

The liberating truth, she believed, is that while the members of Christ's Body are "*empty*, mere *Vacuities*," Christ as the "Head, *filleth all in all!*" One is reminded of Paul's testimony, "It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). Because of her "emptiness," she wrote, Christ "flows thro' me, *little me*, into the other and greater Members of the Body! All Glory to my Lord, the *filling Head*, for all that *satisfying Joy*, with which thro' *me*, he has filled any, and so many of his dear Members." Although some of her fellow members of Christ's Body were superior to her in public renown and ministerial calling, they nevertheless could not say "to inferior me, *we have no Need of thee!*"[4] Each part of the Body has a part to play, and Dutton's part was spiritual writing and counseling.

**Dutton attempted to strengthen counselees' faith so as to lead them to obedience and holiness. Repentance, she thought, must be grounded in one's relationship with God and flow from faith and love, not fear and anxiety.**

Dutton followed the common practice in her day of referring to correspondents as "Brother" or "Sister," and in other ways she alluded to the biblical concept of the Church as God's family. For example, she counseled George Whitefield to remember that Christ was his "Brother" who understood all of his trials and could have compassion upon him with a "Brother's *Heart*."[5] The familial model of spiritual direction led her to initiate a correspondence with those with whom she disagreed, like John Wesley (concerning doctrine) and James Robe of Kilsyth, Scotland (concerning practice). Seeking to correct a revival practice used by Robe, Dutton wrote to him as a "fellow Citizen" in "another room" of "the Household of God" in order to have a little "Paper Converse" with him concerning "our Lord's Family Affairs."[6] The familial basis of her spiritual direction ministry served as a theological reason why she freely corresponded with evangelical leaders such as Harris, Whitefield, Wesley, and Robe. In the body of Christ there is only one "Head," Jesus, and in the family of God there is only one "Father," God. All believers therefore are equal brothers and sisters. Dutton took this theology seriously, and as a spiritual guide she related to counselees as an elder sister guiding the younger "Babes" who were ignorant or forgetful of the contours of the Christian pilgrimage.

### COMFORTING BEFORE EXHORTING

Because he believed "our Lord has entrusted [her] with a Talent of Writing for Him," Howell Harris entreated Dutton to produce a tract that would firmly reprimand "backsliding" Christians.[7] Dutton accepted the

commission, but she refused to write as sharply as Harris expected. Her rationale was that both foolish and wise "virgins" were "sleeping" and therefore "there needs a great Deal of spiritual Wisdom, to Cry aloud against Sin without wounding the Faith of God's dear Children, as to their Interest in Christ and his Salvation."[8]

With a great concern for weak and wounded Christians, she worried that a strong judgment of "Hypocrites that at this Day are sadly under the Prevalency of Sin" could lead to the wounding of "some of God's Hidden Ones, that he would have Comforted and Helped." At the same time, she appreciated the need to reveal to true Christians their sins and how it was their duty to become Christ-like. Dutton believed that if either pole was neglected—"comforting the Saints, and strengthening their Faith" or "warning them against Sin, and exciting them to Holiness"—then she and Harris were neglecting their "Duty of Love which we owe them."

Dutton believed that when people sin, Satan tempts them to "Unbelief, to question their Interest in Christ; and thereby drives them into more Ungodliness." In contrast, when God reproves people for their sins, "He first Commends what is Good in them, and then shews them what is Evil."Comforting and strengthening, Dutton concluded, should precede and be the basis for her warning and reproving. This pattern, used by the Apostle Paul in his letters, is the one she wished to follow. She attempted to heal counselees' souls and strengthen their faith so as to lead them to obedience and holiness. Repentance, according to Dutton, must be grounded in one's relationship with God and should flow from faith and love, not fear and anxiety.[9]

## WATCHING ONE'S THOUGHTS

In a letter to a "Mr. H. T." who lived in George Whitefield's Bethesda community in Georgia, Dutton described several spiritual practices as the "means to keep your Heart in a holy Bent against Sin." In addition to "secret prayer" and meditation on God's Word, she suggested "watchfulness."

> Once more, another Means I intreat you to make Use of, is, Watchfulness. Watch the first Motions of Sin, and kill 'em in the *Bud*. Beware likewise, that you go not to the *String's-End*, as it were, that you go not to the utmost of that Liberty you think you may have, and yet keep from the Act of Sin. Dallying with Temptations, is entering into them. Converse with Satan is the ready Way to be overcome. If we wou'd not yield to any Act of Sin; let's beware that we yield not to a pleasing Thought about it.[10]

Elsewhere she refers to this practice of watchfulness as the "Art of War," suggesting that trained vigilance is required on the battlefield of one's heart.[11]

Dutton drew a distinction between immoral thoughts—blasphemous, angry, anxious, or unbelieving fantasies or ideas that come into our minds—and actions to which we willfully consent. To a sister struggling with "athe-

istical Thoughts," Dutton first consoled her by suggesting that this obstacle was a common one on the Christian journey. She told the woman to cast the thoughts out "with Lothing; but be not distressed: For they are not your Sins, any further than consented to." Even if she did consent to the thought, Dutton noted, she had no reason "to be distressed with a desponding Fear, as if there was no Help for thee in God." Finally, Dutton counseled the woman that on "the first Onset" of the thought she should immediately "*flee for Refuge to the Hope set before you*; and to haste away to *Christ*."[12]

Even simple acts of yielding to temptation are not inconsequential, because they can lead to sinful habits. "As every Act of Grace, immediately tends to the *Increase* of that Grace which is acted; so every Act of Sin, *strengthens* the Habit of Sin," Dutton wrote. "Every yielding to a *Temptation*, by an Act of *Sin*, whether more inward, or outward, is as it were an *Opening the Floodgates*, to let in a mighty *Torrent of Corruption* to overflow the Soul."[13] The inner war is difficult, for while progress in the spiritual life is slow and by incremental degrees, one act of sin in yielding to temptation can easily overpower the soul and seemingly cancel out whatever progress has been made.

The best response to temptation, as Dutton learned by personal experience at the tender age of fourteen, is to "come to Christ, as a poor Sinner, just as I came at first" whenever she became aware of some oppressive thought. "Parleying" with Satan was pointless. We should not do battle with our oppressive, negative thoughts, but instead "venture on Christ afresh."[14] That is, as soon as we become *aware* of the sensation, feeling, or thought, we should *ask* for transcendent assistance. This *awareness* and *asking* for help leads to interior freedom; we do not violently free ourselves but are freed by the Divine. As the desert father Abba Macarius said, "If the battle is fierce, say, 'Help!' [God] knows what is suitable for you and [God] will take pity on you."[15]

## ENLARGING THE SOUL

We must "watch the heart" for sin, according to Dutton, in order to make room within our souls for enjoying the grandeur of God—"our Soul-satisfying ALL! our delightful CENTER! and eternal REST!"[16] Sin is "the setting up of wretched *Self* and *Creatures*, in any, and every Form," which only "contracts" and ruins the soul, making us miserable. Our happiness depends on the "enlargement" of the soul that comes when we fill it with God and God's glories.

> When we would be *something* in ourselves, *separate* from God, we become *nothing:* nothing that's *Good*, nothing but *Evil*. When we are willing to be *nothing* in ourselves and *all* in God, we possess *Being*, enjoy the great I AM, and in Him possess our *own Souls*. And the *lower* we sink to nothing in *ourselves*, the *lighter* we rise to Being in God, and the *more* our Holiness and Happiness increaseth.[17]

We should not quickly skip over these metaphors of contraction and enlargement of soul, possessing Being, or becoming lighter. They reflect visceral experiences. Consenting to a passing feeling of anger, jealousy, or sadness causes us to become passive to it, contracting something in us, causing us to feel heavy or burdened inside and seemingly possessed by the feeling. Have we not had the sensation of feeling interiorly lighter because of awe or because we did not collude with thoughts that were dissonant to our true identity before God? If so, we have experienced the sense of aliveness Dutton expresses.

## CONCLUSION

In this brief review of her teachings on watchfulness for sin and the enlargement of the soul, we can discern the central themes of Dutton's spiritual direction. First, the Christian journey involves development through successive phases. When she narrated her life story, she borrowed themes from Israel's story—being in captivity, experiencing the Exodus, wandering in the wilderness, entering the Promised Land, being sent into Exile, returning to the restored Jerusalem—to describe the phases of her spiritual growth.[18] Dutton intended her autobiography as a teaching tool: by reading her text, one could learn the core soul gestures necessary for deeper intimacy with the Trinity. Elsewhere, as we have seen, she used the Johannine typology of *babes*, *young men*, and *fathers* to name the stages of growing in faith and grace (cf. 1 John 2:12-14).

Dutton certainly did not think the Christian journey is without difficulties and even setbacks. If space allowed, we could mention her helpful teaching concerning "dark nights" and "winter seasons" of the soul, the experience of the "sealing of the Spirit" whereby God granted a full assurance of faith, and how "faith…can pierce the cloud" veiling God's presence. Yet this brief introduction to her spiritual counsel may encourage further reading in her work, which is not only historically important, but spiritually insightful.[19]

## NOTES

1 "Letter 9," Anne Dutton to Jonathan Barber, *Letters on Spiritual Subjects, &c. Divers Occasions, Sent to the Reverend George Whitefield, and others of his Friends and Acquaintance…* (London: printed by J(ohn) Hart and sold by John Lewis and Ebenezer Gardner, 1745), 50.

2 "Letter 30," Anne Dutton to J(ames) E(rskine), Esq., *Letters* (London: J. Hart, 1743), 157; and *A Letter to such of the Servants of Christ, Who may have any Scruple about the Lawfulness of Printing any Thing Written by a Woman: To Shew, that Book-Teaching is Private, with Respect to the Church, and Permitted to Private Christians; Yea, Commanded to those, of either Sex, Who are Gifted for, and Inclin'd to Engage in this Service* (London: J. Hart, 1743).

3 Dutton employs these images in her accounts of a severe personal illness and the death of her first husband, Thomas Cattell, in her autobiography, *A Brief Account of the Gracious Dealings of God…, Part II* (London: J. Hart, 1743), 26-32.

4 "Letter 34," Anne Dutton to John Lewis, *Letters II*, 200.

5 "Letter 3,"Anne Dutton to George Whitefield, *Letters III*, 10.

6 Letter to James Robe from Anne Dutton, *The Christian History*, *Containing ACCOUNTS*

*of the Revival and Propagation of RELIGION in Great-Britain & America. For the Year 1743*, edited by Thomas Prince, Jr., 1, no. 5 (April 2, 1743). By the time he received the letter, Robe had already changed his mind, but he thought the letter so good that he included it in his *Narrative* of the revival in Kilsyth, Scotland.

7 "Letter 888," Howell Harris to Anne Dutton (June 4, 1743), The National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, UK.

8 "Letter 921," Anne Dutton to Howell Harris (July 13, 1743), The National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, UK. The tract she wrote for Harris was soon appended to *The Hurt that Sin Doth to Believers* (1743) as "A Word of Intreaty to All Those that Name the Name of Christ, to depart from Iniquity" (London: printed by John Hart and sold by John Lewis and Ebenezer Gardner, 1743; 1749).

9 "Letter 921," Anne Dutton to Howell Harris (July 13, 1743), The National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, UK. "And when He calls upon his sinful People to Return to him, He put them in Mind of their Relation, to Move them. 'Turn, O backsliding Children, saith the LORD, for I am Married unto you.' And we know by experience, that Gospel-Repentance, flows from Faith and Love. And to this End, the Faith and Love of poor Backsliders must be strengthened, or they will not Return unto the Lord."

10 "Letter 4," *Letters I*, 17-18.

11 "Letter 30," Anne Dutton to Mrs. E. B., *Letters I*, 211.

12 "Letter 29," Anne Dutton to Mrs. E. G., *Letters I*, 192-195.

13 *The Weekly History, or, An Account of the Progress of the Most Remarkable Particulars Relating to the Progress of the Gospel* (London: printed by John Lewis, 1741-42), lxviii. This basic principle reflects the practicality of much of her spiritual counsel: acts of faith and grace lead to habits of faith and grace, just as acts of sin lead to habits of sin.

14 *A Brief Account, Part I*, 37-38.

15 Benedicta Ward, translator, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, revised edition (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1987), Macarius 19.

16 "The Guilt of a Believer's departing from God," in *Meditations and Observations upon the Eleventh and Twelfth Verses of the Sixth Chapter of Solomon's Song* (1743), 60.

17 "Some Thoughts about Sin and Holiness," *Meditations and Observations*, 61-62.

18 See especially *A Brief Account II*. Dutton perceives her call to spiritual writing as a "return" to the Promised Land when she is finally "planted in the House of the Lord."

19 JoAnn Ford Watson has edited three short volumes of Anne Dutton's writings under the title *Selected Spiritual Writings of Anne Dutton: Eighteenth-Century British-Baptist, Woman Theologian* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003, 2004, and 2006). Volume one, *Letters*, includes a selection of letters and Watson's introduction to Dutton's life and work. The second volume, *Discourses, Poetry, Hymns, Memoir*, features Dutton's most lucid description of the landscape of the Christian spiritual pilgrimage, *A Discourse on Walking with God*. The final volume, *The Autobiography*, includes all three parts of Dutton's spiritual autobiography that recounts her life up to 1750.

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# The Triumph of the Eye

BY RALPH C. WOOD

**In a society ever more determined by visual appeal, men begin to desire women who conform to a certain shape and look perpetually young. Women, in turn, strive to conform to eye-driven male desire. How can we reshape imagination to prefer spiritual vision to mere sight?**

In Letter XX of *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis takes his readers by surprise when the demon named Screwtape urges his sub-demon named Wormwood to cease making direct attacks on the chastity of the recently converted Christian whose faith they are seeking to subvert. Overt and obvious urges to sexual self-indulgence—perhaps masturbation or even fornication—can be resisted, says Screwtape. (Frederick Buechner likens such raw lust to a craving for salt in a man who is dying of thirst.[1]) For when the Christian learns to discipline himself against such gross desires, Screwtape complains, his chastity will become increasingly immune to demonic allurements. He may indeed become a faithful husband and perhaps a father.

Something subtler is needed, Screwtape declares, a shrewder tactic, one more likely to destroy chastity, the master demon argues. Hence his odd proposal to make "the rôle of the eye in sexuality more and more important [while] at the same time making its demands more and more impossible."[2] When I ask my students to interpret this passage, they are often nonplussed. They do not really understand the devil's craftiness. The reason, I believe, is that they are products of our overwhelmingly ocular culture and thus are often opaque to Lewis's meaning.

There is little doubt that our lives as Americans are ever more visually determined. We receive the world almost entirely through the projection of

images onto screens—whether they are located on our computers, our televisions, or at the cinema. A colleague who teaches Film Studies reports that most American college students have seen one hundred movies for every book they have read. What this radically ocular re-orientation has done to our reading habits is obvious. What it has done to our sexuality is not so plain. Yet already in 1942 C. S. Lewis discerned the problem, even when most other eyes were turned on the horrors of the Second World War.

> **The giant success of the American cosmetic surgery business and the pervasiveness of eating disorders are markers of what C. S. Lewis calls the demonic triumph of the eye.**

When the eye triumphs, especially in the way men view women, then something demonic happens, Lewis suggests. Men begin to desire women who conform to a certain shape, women who look perpetually young, women who are "less willing and less able to bear children," as Lewis says. Writing more than sixty years ago, he nonetheless foresaw the familiar pattern of our time. "We now teach men," Screwtape gleefully confirms, "to like women whose bodies are scarcely distinguishable from those of boys." The devils thus prompt women to wear clothes that "make them appear firmer and more slender and more boyish than nature allows a full-grown woman to be."[3]

Martha Croker, a character in Tom Wolfe's novel of 1998, *A Man in Full*, is such a woman. She is the fifty-three-year-old ex-wife of Charlie Croker, an aging real estate developer whose trophy wife Serena is half Charlie's age. Recognizing that, alas, she will never again have the filly-like appearance of Serena, Martha reflects on the younger women at the health club where she works fiercely at her own aerobic exercises: "They had nice wide shoulders and nice narrow hips and nice lean legs and fine definition in the muscles of their arms and backs. They were built like boys, boys with breasts and hurricane manes." Wolfe continues, "Only vigorous exercise could help you even remotely approach the feminine ideal of today—*a Boy with Breasts!* …The exercise salons were proliferating like cellular telephones and CD-ROMs. *Boys with breasts!*"[4] Wolfe the deft satirist uses this phrase in witty mockery, knowing all too well that it is the eye-dominated dream-model that haunts many American women.

A friend of mine found his thirteen-year-old daughter's diary lying open in such a fashion as to invite her father's inspection. There he found these words scrawled in large letters: "I despise my body." Unable to make her teenage figure approximate the proverbial Coke-bottle shape, this woman-child has had her self-worth shattered. She has been virtually crushed by

the desire for a false bodily conformity that has been imposed on her and that she has embraced without knowing it. A former student, seeking to treat lightly what is in fact an immensely sad matter, confesses that, if his mother keeps having her face lifted, her cheeks will eventually meet at the back of her neck. A similarly troubling disclosure brought to light by the O. J. Simpson trial is that, while neither Nicole Brown Simpson nor any of her three sisters had ever earned a college degree, all four had undergone breast enhancement surgery.

The moral and religious implications here are huge, not only for women, but also for us men who, because we are dominated by the eye, demand that women meet the expectations of the notorious "male gaze." The giant success of the American cosmetic surgery business is a marker of what Lewis calls the demonic triumph of the eye. It has been reported that, in this country alone, there were nearly eleven million cosmetic surgeries performed in 2006, but then twelve million in 2007. Following close behind the American market is Europe, where elective cosmetic surgeries generate $2.2 billion in annual business. The five most common of these so-called "aesthetic" procedures for women are mammaplasty (breast augmentation), lipoplasty (body contouring), blepharoplasty (eyelid lifting), abdominoplasty ("tummy tuck"), and breast reduction.[5]

While cosmetic surgery is an entirely elected response to eye-driven male desire, bulimia and anorexia often are not. Instead, the bulimic and the anorexic seek to become literal no-bodies, stripped of hips *and* breasts, returning to a prepubescent state, shriveling into a skeletal shape that exposes the absurdity of our culture's androgynous ideal by way of exaggeration, distortion, and negation. These dreadful eating disorders have complex causes, but the result is almost always the same: an obsessive fear of gaining weight. Anorexics seek to drastically lower their body weight by willful starvation, excessive exercise, or so-called diet pills. Bulimics, by contrast, massively overeat and then force themselves to vomit, or else they resort to enemas, laxatives, and diuretics. Again a personal example: A friend reports spending more than $100,000 for his daughter's four collegiate years of psychiatric treatment for bulimia—all because her boyfriend complained that she was fat. The poor girl would have done better to dump her lover. Such candor is hard to find in an eye-ridden time such as ours. Humor is even further away. We need more women akin to the jovial old lady who declared that she would rather shake than rattle.

If the demons have distorted our view of women by a victorious ocular deceit, where might a Christian remedy lie? Lewis's profoundest work, *Till We Have Faces*, offers implicit answers.[6] It concerns a woman named Orual, who is obsessed with her own physical ugliness. Among other nasty names

that her father once used to belittle her, perhaps the worst is "curd face." Because Orual is physically unattractive, there is no hope of her ever marrying a wealthy prince and thus no likelihood of her bringing both money and might to the Kingdom of Glome, where her father brutally rules.

Without rehearsing the complicated plot of Lewis's fine novel, suffice it to say that Orual seeks her own power and influence in order to achieve the glory that she could not win by physical beauty. To increase her sense of mystery as well as to hide her shame at the awful evils she eventually commits, Orual wears a veil to cover her guilty face. Knowing that it would be an evil deed of my own to spoil the plot by reporting its outcome, I will concentrate instead on the truth that Orual gradually learns and that eventually redeems her—namely, how to differentiate sight from vision.

**Regarding the face as our most distinguishing characteristic, C. S. Lewis insists that we cannot have true faces apart from true faith in God. There are huge implications here for overcoming the devilish deceits of the eye in our time.**

Vision is central to the biblical tradition. It is distinguished from mere sight. If we see *with* our eyes, using them as mere optical instruments, then we have only *sight*: the perception only of the outward and visible and often ephemeral things that Orual came so passionately to desire: wealth and power and position. If, by contrast, we see *through* our eyes, with lenses formed by true convictions about God and man and the world, then we have *vision*. We can discern what is not apparent, what is not obvious, but what is indeed ultimately valuable. Especially can we recognize the true beauty of women.

Scripture itself makes this distinction. "No one shall see God and live," is a familiar refrain. God's utter holiness would obliterate any sinful creature who beheld it directly. In a memorable scene, God hides Moses in the cleft of the rock, covering him with a hand as God passes by Moses (Exodus 33:20-23). Nor does Moses encounter God directly on Mount Sinai when he is given the Ten Commandments; instead, he hears God speak in the midst of dense smoke. Yet while the Bible downplays raw naked sight, it elevates revelatory vision. Job, for example, hears the voice of God speak to him "out of the whirlwind," answering Job's justifiable lament against the injustices he has suffered (Job 38-41).

So do Israel's prophets repeatedly receive visions that become the basis for their utterances and commands. Perhaps the most notable of these visionary encounters with God is recorded in Isaiah 6, where the prophet

discerns the presence of the enthroned Lord surrounded by terrifying angels. Only then—having been given this remarkable vision—is Isaiah able to repent of his sin and thus to hear and heed God's voice. We are not to take lightly, it follows, the warning of Proverbs: "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (29:18).

It is noteworthy that in *The Lord of the Rings,* Tolkien has his demonic figure named Sauron embody himself as a gigantic all-seeing Eye. In constituting himself as a single ocular master, he believes he can control all that his eye surveys. Yet Sauron makes a double mistake, and thus he is ironically undone by the triumph of the ocular. In having only a single eye, he can descry only breadth and not depth; everything looks flat and undifferentiated. It also gives him only sight and not vision. He can scan the surface of everything, but he can penetrate the profundity of nothing. He assumes, to his ultimate cost, that small creatures called hobbits must be as weak as they are diminutive. He lacks the vision possessed by Gandalf to discern that these halflings have the inward courage and strength to resist the most powerful of evils.

The New Testament makes a similar distinction between sight and vision. The first three Gospels record Jesus as having spoken in parables so that, as Mark strangely puts it, "they may indeed see but not perceive" (4:12, RSV).[7] The deep things of the kingdom, Jesus declares, cannot be easily understood because they are matters of vision rather than sight. His command for those who have ears to hear, to listen, and eyes to see, to see, is a clear reference to moral and spiritual vision rather than bare sight (Mark 4:9; cf. Mark 8:18). The author of First Timothy declares, therefore, that God dwells in "unapproachable light" and thus cannot be seen with the human eye (6:16). Paul also declares that, even in knowing the love of Christ, we still behold God as if in a dim mirror, and that only in the life to come shall we behold him "face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Passages such as these have led the church's theologians to speak of the Beatific Vision as the ultimate privilege of Paradise. This doctrine is based on the promise of our Lord that "the pure of heart…will see God" (Matthew 5:8). Thomas Aquinas declared that such direct and unmediated sight of the Lord in all his goodness and glory is the happy purpose for which humanity was created and thus the blessed end toward which we are all meant to "live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). In C. S. Lewis's terms, this is what it means to "have faces"—namely, for God to behold us as creatures who have been redeemed by his grace, so that we, in turn, might be able "to know God and to enjoy him forever."

Lewis is right to regard the face as our most distinguishing characteristic, and for insisting that we cannot have true faces apart from true faith in

God. There are huge implications here for overcoming the devilish deceits of the eye in our time. Many women have truly blessed faces without recourse to the cosmetics industry, much less to the expense and pain of cosmetic surgeries. Almost all icons of the Theotokos—the Mother of God, as the Virgin Mary is called in the Orthodox tradition—depict her with dark half-circles under her eyes. Far from marring her beauty, these signs of her suffering actually enhance her beauty. They reveal that she is no shallow and superficial maiden, but rather a woman of immense character and quality—precisely because she has declared her ultimate "Yes" to God himself, even at the cost of immense grief and distress. Icons of the Apostle Paul also depict him with deep creases across his forehead—evidence not only of his suffering for the sake of Christ, but also of his mind-wrenching efforts to probe the depths of the Gospel.

**Almost all icons of the Virgin Mary depict her with dark half-circles under her eyes. Far from marring her beauty, these signs of her suffering actually enhance her beauty.**

Forty-five years after first encountering him in the classroom, I can still recall the remarkable countenance of my major professor in college. He confessed one day in class—to the surprise of us youths largely unacquainted with grief—that the folds of his face were his "battle scars." I was not alone in drawing the right inference: he was our best teacher because he had fought the inward and spiritual battles that outwardly marked his face.

The novelist Peter De Vries told a similar story about himself, except in reverse. He was serving as an editor of a sophisticated Chicago literary journal during the 1930s, fashioning himself as something of a dandy and aesthete whose hero was Oscar Wilde. But one day an older writer bluntly declared to De Vries that he had "a face unmarked by sorrow." Utterly shaken by this searing indictment, De Vries took the rest of the day off, the better to ponder his own superficiality.[8]

Surely the most notable face in American history is Abraham Lincoln's. Those who saw it only through the lens of the untrained eye found it almost hideously ugly. In fact, Lincoln made jokes about his unattractiveness, saying that if he were a self-made man, then he had done "a damn bad job." Others, possessing real vision, saw the remarkable beauty of Lincoln's visage, especially in its sadness, as he spiritually absorbed the woes of his nation. The novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne, visiting the president in 1862, beheld the same beauty: "The whole physiognomy is as coarse a one as you would meet anywhere in the length and breadth of the States; but, withal, it is redeemed, illuminated, softened, and brightened by a kindly though

serious look out of his eyes, and an expression of homely sagacity, that seems weighted with rich results of village experience."[9]

John Donne possessed the spiritual vision to perceive the true beauty of the womanly face—without the deceits of the eye—in Lady Magdalen Herbert. The mother of George Herbert, the Anglican devotional poet of the seventeenth century, she bore ten children altogether, but their father Charles died shortly after the birth of the tenth child in 1596. She was thus left to rear a large family. After remaining a widow for a dozen years, Lady Herbert married Sir John Danvers, a man many years her junior. It is not difficult to understand why she remained so very attractive to anyone who had eyes to see—who had *vision*. She was a woman of almost unparalleled gifts and accomplishments: she was keenly intelligent, she was cultivated in both arts and letters, she was at once vivacious and pious, and she was possessed of immense charm and attractiveness.

Still able to discern Lady Magdalen's womanly beauty in 1625, when she was in her mid-sixties, John Donne addressed his poem entitled "The Autumnal" to her. The first six (of twelve) stanzas in Donne's Elegy IX record the poet's remarkable vision of this woman who, in her latter years, remained utterly feminine without at all seeking to be "sexy."

No spring, nor summer beauty hath such grace
  As I have seen in one autumnal face;
Young beauties force our love, and that's a rape;
  This doth but counsel, yet you cannot scape.

If 'twere a shame to love, here 'twere no shame;
  Affections here take reverence's name.
Were her first years the Golden Age? That's true,
  But now she's gold oft tried, and ever new.

That was her torrid and inflaming time;
  This is her tolerable tropic clime.
Fair eyes, who asks more heat than comes from hence,
  He in a fever wishes pestilence.

Call not these wrinkles, graves; if graves they were,
  They were Love's graves, for else he is nowhere.
Yet lies not Love dead here, but here doth sit,
  Vowed to this trench, like an anchorit,

And here, till hers, which must be his death, come,
  He doth not dig a grave, but build a tomb.

Here dwells he; though he sojourn everywhere,
  In progress, yet his standing house is here;

Here, where still evening is, not noon, nor night;
  Where no voluptuousness, yet all delight.
In all her words, unto all hearers fit,
  You may at revels, you at counsel, sit.

In spring, Donne declares, youthful beauty is literally eye-catching, so much so that it virtually forces the male gaze to admire it, almost molesting the beholder by the force of its gorgeousness. Summer, by contrast, is a metaphor for fruition and thus of childbearing. Alas, it is also the time that many men assume to mark the end of beauty in women, as their figures are no longer firm and boyish. Autumn, therefore, would seem the least likely place to discern beauty, for it means the end of both youth and middle-age, even as the leaves are falling from the trees, with only the bare trunks and branches remaining. Indeed, autumn marks the beginning of old age and the decline that winter signifies.

Yet Donne pronounces autumnal love and beauty to be the finest of them all. This harvest-time femininity embodies deep wisdom, a truthfulness that is no less escapable than the glare of the gorgeous. Youthful love is often shamefully lustful, Donne knows all too well, but autumnal love is full of reverence and affection rather than naked desire. If one wants to count the early years of eye-appealing comeliness as akin to the Golden Age, Donne does not object—so long as we do not accept the myth that this is the only age of peace and prosperity, with all that follows resulting in calamity and loss. On the contrary, this lady's splendor is all the more golden for having been sifted and tested by age and experience.

In a similar fashion, the eye alone would crave for youthful beauty because it excites the heat of sexual passion (the scorching southern Tropic of Capricorn), while ignoring the temperate zone (the mild northern Tropic of Cancer) that Lady Magdalen now metaphorically occupies. In fact, Donne directly addresses those who behold such womanly beauty with "fair eyes alone" and who thus wish that she were more "steamy" and sensual: he calls them insane, driven mad by lascivious desire that would make not for fruitfulness but the plague. (Donne is not afraid to link the word "pestilence" with the deadly "pox" of sexually transmitted disease.)

He also puns on the word "graves," which is also French for "engravings." This lady's facial furrows must not be construed as disfigurements, for they have been etched there by Love itself, as have the dark moons under the Virgin's eyes in the icons of the Eastern church. As Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, Donne also uses the word "love" as signifying both *agape* and *eros*, both self-emptying surrender *and* self-fulfilling desire. Such double-sided Love is gloriously ensconced in the love-lines of her face,

just as an anchorite is gladly limited to the confines of his cell. Her sociable chastity is a form of avowed holiness no less than the solitary monk's consecration to celibacy.

Love does not scoop out graves in this lovely woman's face. Instead, he shapes the marble effigy that will lie atop her tomb when she dies. Love will indeed go on his perennial journey (his royal "progress") to honor other women possessing such beauty, but he will always return to this lady's monument as his true home. For here, Donne declares, the light of womanly beauty is neither blinding like the overhead sun nor extinguished in sheer darkness. Rather does its splendor dwell in an autumnal femininity. Neither sultry nor seductive, Lady Magdalen's beauty is suffused with a gentle delight, a serene tranquility like the hushed calm of the setting sun. What matters now is not her looks so much as her *speech*, for she both embodies and articulates the wisdom that provides apt advice to all who come to listen, whether it be youth who need restraint from their riotous revels, or adults who need her counsel in discerning the beauty that comes with age.

Thus does Donne propose "a more excellent way" for overcoming what Lewis calls the demonic triumph of the eye. Such a victory will not be easily or quickly won. Yet we might at least make a start by pondering Donne's magnificent tribute to Lady Magdalen Herbert and by inspecting icons of the Virgin Mary. They will enable the reshaping of our imagination no less than our minds, as we learn to distinguish between ocular sight accomplished *with* the eye, on the one hand, and spiritual vision achieved *through* the eye, on the other. Only then shall we behold true feminine beauty. It is a beauty found in the voice of wisdom and companionship rather than the shape of the hourglass. It is an autumnal beauty often located in young women imbued with moral seriousness. Creased with the care of both love and sorrow, it is a beauty that can finally behold even God face to face.

## NOTES

1 Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking* (original edition, 1973; revised and expanded edition, San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1993), 54.

2 C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (original edition, 1942; San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 2001), 107.

3 Ibid.

4 Tom Wolfe, *A Man in Full* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998), 192.

5 Statistics for the American market are from "11.7 Cosmetic Procedures in 2007,"The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (February 25, 2008), *www.surgery.org/press/news-release.php?iid=491* (accessed August 9, 2009). ASAPC reports that "Women had 91 percent of cosmetic procedures" and "procedures increased 9 percent" in 2007. For the comparison with Europe, see Sreyashi Dutta, "Cosmetic Surgery Market: Current Trends," *Frost & Sullivan Market Insight* (December 30, 2008), *www.frost.com/prod/servlet/market-insight-top.pag?Src=RSS&docid=153913646* (accessed August 9, 2009).

6 C. S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold* (original edition, 1956; New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1980).

7 Quotation marked "RSV" is from Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright

1952 [second edition, 1971] by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

8 "Adrift in a Laundromat" (a review of Peter De Vries, *The Tents of Wickedness*), *Time* (July 20, 2009), 100.

9 Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Chiefly about War Matters. By a Peaceable Man," *Atlantic Monthly* 10:57 (July 1862), 43-61. This description of President Lincoln was suppressed by the journal editors, with the author's permission, and only printed in an 1883 edition of Hawthorne's essays.

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# ⇝ Other Voices ⇜

God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

**GENESIS 1:27**

Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word.

**LUKE 1:38**

Now, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:
"In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams."

**ACTS 2:16-17**

God has been moving against the bias of gender for all of time, and carefully reading Acts 2:17 in its original context of the book of the prophet Joel is indeed a monumental example of this breaking through….

The greatest news of all human history is the coming of Jesus Christ. What Peter and Joel are saying is awesomely close to this fact, if not equally important to it. It is that the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is coming also. This coming has not received anywhere near its rightful emphasis. We have a church season called *Pentecost*, but even in the liturgical churches, the true significance of the coming of the Holy Spirit "on all flesh" is far from adequately presented.

**ELLA PEARSON MITCHELL (1917-2008), "All Flesh," in *The African American Pulpit* (Spring 1998)**

We are women, and my plea is *Let me be a woman*, holy through and through, asking for nothing but what God wants to give me, receiving with both hands and with all my heart whatever that is. No arguments would ever be needed if we all shared the spirit of the "most blessed among women."

**ELISABETH ELLIOT, "The Essence of Femininity" in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (2006)**

"In light of the rich diversity of ministries that can and once did exist within the local church, what are the distinctive gifts conferred by God on women, and in what forms of ministry can these gifts be best expressed?"

The question is not, “Do women have a role of leadership in the Church?” We need rather to ask, “What is the nature of that role?” And, as we formulate our answer, let us always keep in view the Pauline vision of the Church as unity-in-diversity.

**KALLISTOS WARE, *The Ordination of Women in the Orthodox Church* (2000)**

Why is a woman’s work devalued? Why have women’s contributions to the world been hidden?… For myself, why is it that many Christian young women seeking role models have no idea what women who have come before them have done as mothers, teachers, nurses, missionaries, writers and artists? Feminist scholars are giving us a history. Personally I am thankful for much of this scholarship. We [evangelicals] need to appropriate feminist scholarship where it is good and useful, and we should open up dialogue in this area….

**LILIAN CALLES BARGER, “Women’s Culture: The Gospel and the Future” (2000)**

Women’s history has often been relegated to the shadow world: felt but not seen. Many of our church fathers became prominent because of women. Many of these *fathers* were educated and supported by strong *women*, and some are even credited with founding movements that were actually begun by the women in their lives.

**LAURA SWAN, Introduction to *The Forgotten Desert Mothers* (2001)**

Among the many things that need to be said about the Gospels is that we gain nothing by ignoring the fact that Jesus chose twelve male apostles. There were no doubt all kinds of reasons for this within both the symbolic world in which he was operating and the practical and cultural world within which they would have to live and work. But every time this point is made—and in my experience it is made quite frequently—we have to comment on how interesting it is that there comes a time in the story when the disciples all forsake Jesus and run away; and at that point, long before the rehabilitation of Peter and the others, it is the women who come first to the tomb, who are the first to see the risen Jesus, and are the first to be entrusted with the news that he has been raised from the dead. This is of incalculable significance. Mary Magdalene and the others are the apostles to the apostles. We should not be surprised that Paul calls a woman named Junia an apostle in Romans 16.7. If an apostle is a witness to the resurrection, there were women who deserved that title before any of the men.

**N.T. WRIGHT, *Women’s Service in the Church: The Biblical Basis* (2004)**

Women of New Testament times found that opening their homes as places of meetings where apostle and prophet could address the faithful was another step on the *Together Way*. In many cases this service led to the establishment of permanent churches….

In Acts 12:12 one reads of the disciples meeting at the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, when Peter was delivered from prison and returned to them. No doubt that was a regular meeting place, for Peter not only knew where to go to find the disciples, but the maid, Rhoda, knew him and recognized his voice as he asked to be admitted.

**KATHLEEN MALLORY (1879-1954), *Manual of Woman's Missionary Union* (1949)**

Whenever, or wherever [Salome Lincoln] found the image of Christ, soul mingled with soul, and to such a one, she felt that she was bound by a chord stronger than earthly, and by ties dearer than those which unite parties, sects and denominations; and with such a one, though she might differ on some minor points, she could heartily join, in carrying forward all the benevolent enterprises of the day. Her's [sic] was a Divine mission; her *credentials* she received from the Prince of princes, and to his tribunal alone she stood accountable.

**ALMOND H. DAVIS, *The Female Preacher, or Memoir of Salome Lincoln* (1843)**

In your nature, eternal Godhead, I shall come to know my nature. And what is my nature, boundless Love? It is fire, because you are nothing but a fire of love. And you have given humankind a share in this nature for by the fire of love you created us.

**CATHERINE OF SIENA (1347-1380), Prayer 12**

God has created each one of us, every human being, for greater things—to love and to be loved. But why did God make some of us men and others women? Because a woman's love is one image of the love of God, and a man's love is another image of God's love. Both are created to love, but each in a different way. Woman and man complete each other, and together show forth God's love more fully than either can do it alone….

God told us, "Love your neighbor as yourself." So first I am to love myself rightly, and then to love my neighbor like that. But how can I love myself unless I accept myself as God has made me? Those who deny the beautiful differences between men and women are not accepting themselves as God has made them, and so cannot love the neighbor. They will only bring division, unhappiness, and destruction of peace to the world.

**MOTHER TERESA (1910-1997), A Message For The World Conference On Women, Beijing, China (1995)**

I saw that God rejoiceth that He is our Father, and God rejoiceth that He is our Mother, and God rejoiceth that He is our Very Spouse and our soul is His loved Wife. And Christ rejoiceth that He is our Brother, and Jesus rejoiceth that He is our Saviour. These are five high joys, as I understand, in which He willeth that we enjoy; Him praising, Him thanking, Him loving, Him endlessly blessing.

**JULIAN OF NORWICH (c. 1342-c. 1416), *Revelations***

This image is available in the print version of *Christian Reflection*.

**The presence of the three Marys surrounding the body of Jesus in Giotto's fresco, LAMENTATION, reminds us of the importance of women in the gospel accounts of Christ's life.**

*Giotto di Bondone* (c. 1277-1336/7), *LAMENTATION* (1305-1306). *Fresco,* 78 ¾″ x 72 ⅞″. *Arena Chapel, Padua. Photo: © Alinari/ Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.*

# Mary and the Women from Galilee

BY HEIDI J. HORNIK

Giotto's fresco *Lamentation* in the Arena Chapel continues a tradition of depicting the three Marys' role in the grieving over Jesus' body after it had been taken from the cross (not visible in this painting). This scene of lamentation is an apocryphal story, yet it incorporates significant details from the biblical accounts of the women who were present at the crucifixion and burial of Jesus.

The Gospel of John says that three Marys—Jesus' mother; his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas; and Mary Magdalene—stood near the cross (John 19:25). The Synoptic Gospels report that many women who followed Jesus from Galilee observed his crucifixion "from a distance" (Matthew 27:55; Mark 15:40-41; and Luke 23:48). Mark adds that "among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome" (Mark 15:40b), while Matthew specifically identifies "Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee" as present (Matthew 27:56).

A wealthy disciple, Joseph of Arimathea, received Pilate's permission to prepare Jesus' body for burial. In the Gospel of John, it is only "Nicodemus, who had first come to Jesus by night," that contributes "myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds" and assists Joseph in wrapping the body "with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial customs of the Jews" (John 19:39-40). In the Synoptic Gospels, however, it is the women disciples who observe or assist Joseph in the preparation of the body. Matthew and Mark suggest that two women, Mary Magdalene and another named Mary, were present when Joseph rolled a great stone to cover the entrance to the tomb that had been hewn in the rock (Matthew 27:61; Mark 15:47). The Gospel of Luke reports that several women from Galilee (not identified by name) "saw the tomb, and how his body was laid; then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments" (Luke 23:55-56).

When we read the Lukan account in light of the information in Matthew and Mark, we presume that the women must have prepared Jesus' body

This image is available in the print version of *Christian Reflection*.

*Lamentation over the Dead Christ* or *Mater Dolorosa* *(1164). Byzantine fresco. St. Panteleimon, Nerezi, Macedonia. Photo: © Erich Lessing/ Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.*

after it was entombed. In *Lamentation*, however, Giotto depicts the women with the body of Jesus before it is laid within the tomb. The artist probably was inspired in this placement of figures by a Byzantine example similar to the fresco *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (1164) in the Monastery of Saint Panteleimon in Nerezi, Macedonia (see above).

Three women mentioned in the gospel accounts can be clearly identified in Giotto's painting by their visual attributes. Mary, the mother of Jesus, wearing a deep aquamarine gown, holds the head and upper body of Jesus across her lap. This detail of the painting also recalls the *pietà* tradition of Mary mourning over the body of Jesus, another popular apocryphal subject in art. The Christian *Pietà* may have its origin in ancient depictions of the Greek legend of Eos and Memnon. According to legend, during the Trojan War Achilles killed King Memnon and stripped him of his armor. A famous kylix, or drinking cup, crafted by the Archaic vase painter Douris in the fifth century BC, depicts Eos, the goddess of dawn, mourning over the lifeless body of her son Memnon (see p. 53). Like this depiction of Eos, Mary remains composed in expressing her deep grief.

Mary Magdalene, who is identified by her red drapery and long flowing hair, sits with the feet of Christ in her lap. The other Mary, wearing a halo, leans over the body of Christ between the other Marys and below John the Beloved. In tradition the beloved disciple is identified with John the Evan-

This image is available in the print version of *Christian Reflection*.

*Douris Painter (5th BC) Eos with the Body of Her Son Memnon, Slain By Achilles (c. 490-480 BC). Center of red figure cup, 10.5" in diameter. Photo by Hervé Lewandowski:* *© Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.*

gelist, the author of the fourth Gospel, and visually represented as a youth who lacks facial hair.

The long line of the barren rock, perhaps ending in a tomb to the right and outside the border of the painting, leads the viewer's eye back to the intimate exchange between Mary and Christ. The angels in the air above, each with a unique expression of grief (wringing their hands, twisting and turning in various directions), heighten the drama of the death.

Giotto created a new kind of pictorial space in *Lamentation*. Instead of depicting details of the story in a way that forces one to look from one segment of the painting to another, he pushed the entire narrative into the frontal plane, directly confronting the viewer with the monumentality and emotion of the scene. This composition is united by large simple forms, strong and emotional grouping of the figures, and the limited depth of its stage in a manner never found before.

The *Lamentation* is a critical scene for the iconographical program of the Arena Chapel series of frescoes, which are considered to be the most

This image is available in the print version of *Christian Reflection*.

*Arena Chapel, Padua (1305). Interior, looking east. Photo: © Cameraphoto Arte, Venice / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.*

complete series by Giotto done in his mature style. This chapel in Padua, a university town not far from Venice, is usually called "the Arena Chapel" because it is constructed above an ancient Roman arena. The original chapel, dedicated to the Virgin Annunciate, was acquired in 1300 by a wealthy merchant and influential Paduan citizen, Enrico Scrovegni. He rebuilt it with the likely intention of atoning for his sins and those of his father, Riginaldo, for usury. (In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante banishes Riginaldo Scrovegni to the seventh circle of hell, the part of hell reserved for usurers.[1]) The church was dedicated on March 16, 1305, to Saint Mary of Charity.

The chapel is very simple architecturally. It has a rectangular form with a starry sky in the barrel vault, a gothic triple lancet window on the façade, and narrow windows on the southern wall. The apse is in the east and the main entrance in the west. The iconographic program is intellectually complex. Theological advisers, who were in consultation with the patron, directed Giotto. The frescoes follow three main themes: scenes in the lives of Mary's parents, Joachim and Anna; scenes from the life of the Virgin; and scenes from the life and death of Christ. Many of these are based in part on hagiographies collected in the *Legenda Aurea*, or *Golden Legend*, by Jacobus da Voragine in 1264.

The magnitude of the project required Giotto to obtain assistance from his workshop, although he executed the principal figures in each scene and devised each spatial composition. Giotto and his assistants painted from top to bottom. Moist plaster had to be applied only to as much surface as could be painted in a day. This area, known as a *giornata*, prevented a premature drying of the wall and assured a true *fresco* composition. Calculated by the *giornate* seams, scholars have determined the frescoes were painted in 852 days.[2]

Enrico Scrovegni probably commissioned Giotto to decorate this chapel because of the artist's contemporary reputation. The *Chronicle* of Giovanni Villani, written just a few years after Giotto's death, described the artist as among the great personalities of the day. The Trecento humanist Boccaccio claimed that Giotto had "brought back to light" the art of painting "which had been buried for centuries beneath the blunders of those who, in their paintings, aimed to bring visual delight to the ignorant rather than intellectual satisfaction to the wise."[3] Dante also predicted Giotto's fame and influence on contemporary culture in the *Divine Comedy*.[4] The Byzantine style of Giotto's teacher, Cimabue, would soon be discarded by Tuscan artists in favor of the style derived from nature painted by Giotto.

The *Flight into Egypt* (see p. 56) is one of the Life of Christ scenes in the middle row on the south wall of the chapel. Iconographically, Mary is the central figure in the painting. Her strength as she holds Jesus on her lap is immediately conveyed to the viewer. Once again, Giotto uses monumental rock forms to accentuate the primary action and direct the viewer's attention: the pyramidal form of the rock frames the Madonna and Child. Joseph is deemphasized on the right side of the composition: while he turns in conversation with a member of the apocryphal entourage, the guiding angel looks directly at Mary.

This emphasis on Mary is a departure from the gospel account, which centers the action of the narrative on Joseph.

> Now after [the wise men] had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."
>
> *Matthew 2:13-15*

Giotto portrays Mary as protector of the Christ Child and, by extension, of the Church. The overtly grand stature of Mary is reminiscent of altar panels depicting the Madonna and Child enthroned. Soon after the comple-

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**Giotto portrays Mary as protector of the Christ Child and, by extension, of the Church. Her grand stature is reminiscent of altar panels depicting the Madonna and Child enthroned.**

*Giotto di Bondone (c. 1277-1336/7), FLIGHT INTO EGYPT (1305-1306). Fresco, 78 ¾″ x 72 ⅞″. Arena Chapel, Padua. Photo: © Alinari / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.*

tion of the Arena Chapel, Giotto himself did such a composition for the Church of the Ognissanti in Florence from 1305 to 1310.

Both of these compositions—*Flight into Egypt* and *Madonna and Child Enthroned*—recall a time of joy for Mary and her infant child. She is able to protect him and comfort him in her arms. Nevertheless, in the *Flight into Egypt,* Mary appears very stern and intent on her goal to bring her child safely to Egypt. As both Mary and Jesus become more lifelike in paintings during the Renaissance period, the intimacy between the mother and child will also become more human.

The theological importance and the stylistic innovations of the Arena Chapel narratives were disseminated throughout fourteenth-century Europe. Giotto reportedly worked throughout Tuscany, northern Italy, and the Kingdom of Naples, including its capital which was ruled by a French dynasty. He is believed to have traveled to France to work in Avignon, the new seat of the papacy after 1305. The great Renaissance artists Masaccio, Leonardo, and Michelangelo studied the frescoes in the Arena Chapel, which are considered Giotto's first masterpiece and an important milestone in the development of western religious painting.

## NOTES

1 In the *Inferno*, Canto XI, line 64, Dante indirectly identifies Riginaldo—"one who had an azure, pregnant sow / inscribed as emblem on his white pouch"—by the Scrovegni coat of arms.

2 John C. Richards, "Giotto di Bondone," *The Oxford Companion to Western Art*, edited by Hugh Brigstocke (*Oxford Art Online*, accessed September 9, 2009), *www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t118/e1049*.

3 Boccaccio, *Decameron*, VI, 5, translated by G. H. McWilliam (New York: Penguin, 2003), 457.

4 In the *Purgatorio*, Canto XI, line 94.

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# Worship Service

BY JULIE MERRITT LEE

*Prelude*

*(A child lights a candle as a symbol of God's presence.)*

*Call to Worship*

Come all who have gathered,
**to taste and see that God is good,**
to trust and hope in the Holy One:
**the Holy Creator,**
the Holy Redeemer,
**the Holy Midwife in our midst.**
Because of you, O God, we are not consumed,
**your compassions never fail.**
They are new every morning.
**Great is your faithfulness.**

*Chiming of the Hour*

*Introit Hymn*

"The Sacred Now"

We begin this day in stillness,
we are here, and it is now:
sacred time in which we've gathered.
Casting cares, we bend and bow.
God of wisdom, God of nurture,
hem us in before, behind.
Hollow out the space inside us;
fill us with pure love divine.

Shapeless void to form and beauty,
in your image, we are made:
breathing, living, moving, striving.
Light of lights, our hearts invade.
For we lay our fears before you,
Love whose power can set us free.
Birth in us the gift of presence;
birth in us eternity.

In this sacred space together,
we are bound and yet we're free:
free to dream and free to cherish
Love that's borne of Trinity.
Bring to us your consolation;
mercies new this day begin.
We remember you have found us;
on this day, we're born again.

*Julie Merritt Lee* (2009)
*Tune*: HYFRYDOL
(pp. 65-67 of this volume)

## *Silent Meditation*

Let nothing trouble you;
let nothing make you afraid.
All things pass away;
God never changes.
Patience obtains everything.
God alone is enough.

*Teresa of Avila* (1515-1582)

## *Unison Prayer of Confession*[1]

Holy and merciful One, we confess:
that you are God and we are not,
that you are infinite and we are limited,
that you are immortal and we are human,
that you are wholeness and we are broken,
that you are our source and we are in need.

*(silent prayers of confession)*

Hear our prayer today and throughout this week.
We pray through Christ, whom we follow. Amen.

*Psalm Reading:* Psalm 48:9-14

We ponder your steadfast love, O God,
  in the midst of your temple.
Your name, O God, like your praise,
  reaches to the ends of the earth.
Your right hand is filled with victory.
  Let Mount Zion be glad,
let the towns of Judah rejoice
  because of your judgments.

Walk about Zion, go all around it,
  count its towers,
consider well its ramparts;
  go through its citadels,
that you may tell the next generation
  that this is God,
our God forever and ever.
  He will be our guide forever.

*Hymn of Response*

"Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah" (verses 1, 2, and 4)

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy pow'rful hand.
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
feed me till I want no more;
feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain,
whence the healing stream doth flow;
let the fire and cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield,
be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside;
bear me through the swelling current,
Land me safe on Canaan's side;

Songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever give to thee,
I will ever give to thee.

*William Williams* (1745); translated from Welsh to English by Peter Williams (1771), alt.
*Tune:* CWM RHONDDA

## *The Prayers of God's People*[2]

For all women called to visionary clarity…
*(after silent or spoken petitions)* **hear our prayer.**

For all women who nurture the faith of their sisters…
*(after silent or spoken petitions)* **hear our prayer.**

For all women who speak truth to power…
*(after silent or spoken petitions)* **hear our prayer.**

For all women who write words of wisdom, beauty, and life…
*(after silent or spoken petitions)* **hear our prayer.**

For all women gifted with melodies and song…
*(after silent or spoken petitions)* **hear our prayer.**

For all women who heal…
*(after silent or spoken petitions)* **hear our prayer.**

For all women who cherish creation and discern in it the ways of the Creator…
*(after silent or spoken petitions)* **hear our prayer.**

For all women whose names and lives are forgotten…
*(after silent or spoken petitions)* **hear our prayer.**

For each of us here and for all those we have brought into the circle with us…
*(after silent or spoken petitions)* **hear our prayer. Amen.**

## *Offering*

## *New Testament Reading:* John 16:21

When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world.

## *Old Testament Reading:* Exodus 1:8-22

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."

The Word of the Lord for God's people.
**Thanks be to God.**

## *Sermon*

## *Silent Reflection*[3]

There is no other way: I will have to learn to practice midwifery crouched amidst heaps of rubble.

I pledge allegiance to this vision of the divine presence
and to the vision of the world for which it stands
one world
in which violence and fragmentation are real
yet in which God labors to bring forth life.
I am called to kneel beside Her
in Her labor.

*Teresa Berger*

## *Hymn of Commitment*

"The Women's Hymn"

Come, women, wide proclaim
life through your Savior slain;
sing evermore.
Christ, God's effulgence bright,
Christ, who arose in might,
Christ, who crowns you with light,
praise and adore.

Come, clasping children's hands,
sisters from many lands,
teach to adore.
For the sin sick and worn,
the weak and overborne,
all who in darkness mourn,
pray, work, yet more.

Work with your courage high,
sing of the daybreak nigh,
your love outpour.
Stars shall your brow adorn,
your heart leap with the morn,
and, by his love upborne,
hope and adore.

Then when the garnered field
shall to our Master yield
a bounteous store,
Christ, hope of all the meek,
Christ, whom all the earth shall seek,
Christ your reward shall speak,
joy evermore.

*Fannie E. S. Heck* (1913)
*Tune*: ITALIAN HYMN

## *Benediction*

All shall be well
and all shall be well,
and all manner of thing shall be well.

*Julian of Norwich* (c. 1342-c. 1416)

## NOTES

1 Adapted from a prayer by Burt Burleson for DaySpring Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, February 25, 2004.

2 Teresa Berger, *Fragments of Real Presence: Liturgical Traditions in the Hands of Women* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005), 84-85. Used by permission.

3 Ibid., 70. Used by permission.

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# The Sacred Now

BY JULIE MERRITT LEE

We begin this day in stillness,
we are here, and it is now:
sacred time in which we've gathered.
Casting cares, we bend and bow.
God of wisdom, God of nurture,
hem us in before, behind.
Hollow out the space inside us;
fill us with pure love divine.

Shapeless void to form and beauty,
in your image, we are made:
breathing, living, moving, striving.
Light of lights, our hearts invade.
For we lay our fears before you,
Love whose power can set us free.
Birth in us the gift of presence;
birth in us eternity.

In this sacred space together,
we are bound and yet we're free:
free to dream and free to cherish
Love that's borne of Trinity.
Bring to us your consolation;
mercies new this day begin.
We remember you have found us;
on this day, we're born again.

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# The Sacred Now

JULIE MERRITT LEE

ROLAND H. PRICHARD

1 We be - gin this day in still - ness, we are
2 Shape less void to form and beau - ty, in your
3 In this sa - cred space to - ge - ther, we are

6

here and it is now: sa - cred time in which we've
im - age we are made: brea - thing, li - ving, mo - ving,
bound and yet we're free: free to dream and free to

12

ga - thered. Cast - ing cares, we bend and bow.
stri - ving. Light of lights, our hearts in - vade.
che - rish Love that's borne of Tri - ni - ty.

17

God of wis - dom, God of nur - ture, hem us
For we lay our fears be - fore you, Love whose
Bring to us your con - so - la - tion; mer - cies

22

in be - fore be - hind. Hol - low out the
po - wer can set us free. Birth in us the
new this day be - gin. We re - mem - ber

27

space in - side us; fill us with pure love di - vine.
gift of pre - scence; birth in us e - ter - ni - ty.
you have found us; on this day, we're born a - gain.

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*Baylor University, Waco, TX*

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# Serving God, Not Men or Women

BY EMILY ROW PREVOST

**Sometimes, despite our best attempts to hear ministry direction from God, we just get it wrong. When we are trying to discern a calling from God, we may be surrounded by people with the best of intentions who help us get it wrong.**

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> Paul an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead…. Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.
>
> *Galatians 1:1, 10*

We often get it wrong. How often have God's people, with the best of intentions, gotten it wrong? Samuel, the Lord's prophet, was about to anoint the next king of Israel. If he went with his first inclination, we would have grown up reciting in Sunday school that the first two kings of Israel were Saul and Eliab. Then there are the apostles, who lived and walked with Jesus, and yet chastised Peter for going to eat with Gentiles (Acts 11). And let us not forget the prime example: the religious leaders who had awaited the Messiah only to end up putting him to death. Sometimes, despite our best attempts to hear from God, we just get it wrong.

I spent half of my life trying to discern a calling from God while surrounded by people with the best of intentions who helped me get it wrong. When I first began to discern that God was calling me to serve in vocational

ministry, I had never seen a woman youth minister, children's minister, or music minister, and I had definitely never seen a woman pastor. What was I to conclude, then, but that I was obviously hearing incorrectly? Gratefully, my church and several ministers I knew quickly helped me figure it out. "You will make a great pastor's wife," I was told on more than one occasion. In fact, this idea was floated so often that I finally determined this was clearly my only option. I needed to become a pastor's wife. Whew. Good. That's settled. Or was it?

Several years later, while trying to discern how to proceed in ministry as a single female, I came to the unsettling realization that maybe we had all gotten it wrong. Perhaps I did not need to be married and a pastor's wife in order to serve in ministry. Surrounded by a whole new crop of God's people in a different place, I found that a woman could serve in all kinds of church ministries. Whew. Good. That's settled. Or was it?

Lately as my doctoral studies draw to a close, I have been inundated with a new round of questions about how I will live out my calling. When I indicate that I am still committed to serving in church ministry, the question frequently comes, "As a pastor?" I often watch faces drop as I respond, "No, I really think I want to work with children." One dear friend went so as far as to say, "Why would you waste your seminary training teaching first graders?" For what it's worth, there is no better place for me to use my seminary education. After all, Jesus said that only those who become as little children will enter the kingdom of God.

I am grateful to have been surrounded my entire life with people who wanted to support me: I have been prayed for and encouraged to live out God's calling in my life. It's just that more often than not, those people have had pretty strong ideas of what that calling ought to look like.

The Apostle Paul (or "Saul" as a young man) seems to have had the same problem in his attempts to preach the gospel. Saul's life was pretty well drawn out for him. As he excelled in his religious studies, don't you know that the religious leaders were proud of him?

Can you hear them mapping out the plan for his future? "That's our boy, Saul," they thumped, and "He will become a great protector of the integrity of our tradition."

I can imagine the discussions between Saul and his teachers. "Saul, you are going to make a great defender of the faith." "But what does that mean?" he asks. "Saul, it is clear that God's hand is upon you. You must eliminate false teaching and those who would draw people away from truth."

Saul lived up to expectations. He did everything that would make him look good in the eyes of the religious leaders: kept the tradition, quoted

Scripture, stood by in support while they stoned Stephen, and relentlessly persecuted the followers of the Way.

Saul knew what his life was supposed to look like. Saul, set apart from birth by God, knew exactly what his ministry would be. Or did he?

Well, if not from the start, then surely after Jesus revealed himself to Saul on the road to Damascus. After all, from that day forward they said of him, "The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy" (Galatians 1:23). Even Ananias got the word from day one that Saul would be preaching to the Gentiles (Acts 9:16). Unfortunately, not everyone heard this word from God and was ready to wholeheartedly support this ministry.

**I am anxious for the next generation of young men and women to grow up in congregations that have stopped trying to put the work of God in a box or to pre-determine that ministry must look or sound a certain way.**

But, by this time, Paul had learned that he was not sent by people, but by God. Paul makes this clear when he declares that he is "an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead" (Galatians 1:1). In case people misunderstood or thought that somehow Paul had twisted his message or his purpose to fulfill the cause of humans, he asks them outright, "Do you think I'm trying to win the approval of people? Does it look like I'm trying to please you?" (cf. Galatians 1:10). Paul learned that it was better to take his direction straight from God, lest he end up getting rid of the true followers of God again.

Paul was done with human-pleasing. He was done with preaching only what looked good to the people around him. He was even done preaching only to those who fit the agenda of his Christian brothers and sisters. So Paul did an unexpected thing: he preached to the Gentiles. He even stopped asking what others expected. Rather than consulting with the apostles, he went straight to Arabia to seek a word directly from God (Galatians 1:15-17). When he did get together with Peter and James, it was not for long and it was not to seek their approval for what he had been sent to do. No, Paul knew that God had sent him directly to the Gentiles and while it would not make sense to the people around him, Paul knew that he had to obey.

I long for the day when we as the Church stand up and support people to live out their calling no matter what it looks like. I am anxious for the

next generation of young men and women to grow up in congregations that have stopped trying to put the work of God in a box or to pre-determine that ministry must look or sound a certain way. In that day we will encourage men and women to stand up and live out the calling of God in their lives as doctors, teachers, accountants, preachers, and even children's ministers. But until that day, and even after that day arrives, I am grateful for the example of Paul who reminds us that we do not serve people. We serve God.

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# All Are One in Christ Jesus

BY ROBBIE FOX CASTLEMAN

**Like my brother, my gendered personhood in Christ matters. Our equality in Christ Jesus is not a thing to be grasped at, fought over, proven and made the standard-bearer of our rights for women or for men—not if we are talking about the kingdom of God and our partnership in the gospel.**

For many years I have enjoyed being a Bible teacher. I have taught the Scripture for Sunday schools, Bible studies, women's conferences, university classrooms, and Sunday morning services.[1] I do not care if I am up or down, in the pulpit or down in the basement. I do not care if someone calls what I do teaching, preaching, sharing, or just talking. As a woman, I have been criticized by some for settling for a music stand on the floor in a church where only men are in the pulpit; and I have been criticized by others for teaching Scripture (yes, and preaching) in the pulpit by those who prefer women to only teach other women, children, or the lost on the mission field.

To all critics, I reply with three basic points. First, my gift of teaching the Bible is given in service to God's people and I am willing to make far more of the message than the messenger. Secondly, the exercise of one's gifts is never a "right" for men or women. The opportunity to edify the Church with what God gives is always a privilege of the call. The exercise of a spiritual gift is always a response to an invitation—by God, and by God's grace through God's people. And thirdly, I am free to promote the ministry

of others and their gifts, but not my own. I can, with the mind of Christ, work for the benefit of others while continuing in my own life and work to sit in the lowly place. That has never been popular, but it is one self-emptying way that Paul recommends in order to regard others as better than oneself. It is the mandate of Jesus and the advice of James. What would happen if men and women in the church—whether egalitarians, complimentarians, or hierarchials in regard to women's service roles—actually began to "have the mind of Christ"?

As a woman, I have tried to avoid writing or publicly speaking out much on "the women's issue," not because it does not concern me, but because I do not want to end up in "women's studies" or on a panel rehashing old arguments. As a scholar, I like to teach New Testament hermeneutics from a Trinitarian, covenantal, quasi-Vanhoozerian framework[2] and have little patience for one more argument about Paul's use of *kephalē* (usually translated "head") in Ephesians 5:23. I am amazed that some brothers who will not give sisters even an inclusionary pronoun in Ephesians 5:21 ("Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ") that does no violence to the intention of the biblical text, will still preach with a straight face a call to losing one's life to find it to the whole congregation. I am not amused when the same people who would quickly and accurately point out the historical and theological distinctions between evangelicals and fundamentalists fail to see how carefully Bible translators work to treat language pertaining to God and language pertaining to humanity very differently.

I have been considering lately the implications of Paul's precise language in Galatians 3:28 that hinges on the change of a conjunction and speaks to "the women's issue" in an interesting way. The Greek sequence of *oude, oude, kai* is telling: "In Christ, there is neither Jew *nor* Greek, there is neither slave *nor* free, there is neither male *and* female." That last phrase echoes the language of the creation story, where "male and female created he them" were designated to bear the *imago Dei* (Genesis 1:27). The Apostle is making the point that gender distinction is a God-created identity, essentially good and right, before the fall. Certainly, after the fall, male and female relationships manifest sin in a myriad of ways and must be redeemed, like all sin, in Christ. Gender distinction is not a manifestation of falleness, but part of God's very good creation both in the beginning and in Christ eternally.

I think this *oude, oude, kai* reality should be increasingly manifest in the life of the church. Our identity in Christ, and our suitability to serve the Church has nothing to do with our racial, socio-economic or gender identities. Paul's admonition in Galations 3:28, "there is neither" (*ouk eni*) is repeated three times in the Greek sentence to emphasize the unity needed in

the Church for all believers to bear together the image of God in the work and mission of the Church. Nevertheless, both egalitarians and complimentarians can probably find a way to use Paul's language in Galatians 3:28 for their own benefit, and this is precisely where I get tired of the argument that wages over my feminine head.

**It is easy to forget that theology matters to, and affects, real people. It is easy to wage a war over words and never honestly ask what is being said about a little over half the people that have ever populated our planet.**

I have often thought how the man born blind (John 9) must have felt when yet one more rabbi and his disciples hovered over his head (I might be blind, but I can hear!) to make him the foci of yet another theological debate about "who sinned." It is easy to forget that theology matters to, and actually affects, real people. It is easy to wage a war over words and never honestly ask what is being said about a little over half the people that have ever populated our planet. For some, it can be a triumphant rush to see oneself as a defender of biblical inerrancy, to be one of the important few who stand fast on biblical authority (and yet gloss over in a variety of ways the counter-cultural advocacy for and inclusion of women in the ministry of Jesus and Paul). I am weary of hearing the point and counter point of *kephalē*, *authentein* (Does it mean "to boldly usurp another's authority"or exercise "any authority at all" in 1 Timothy 2:12?), Junia (Is the fellow prisoner described in Romans 13:7 as "prominent among the apostles" a man or a woman?) and the dispute over *anthropos* (Should it be translated "man" or "human being"?) that a first semester Greek student should have settled. I want Jesus to come by, spit in the mud, treat me like a person in whom God is at work, and end the debate that rages over my life as though I were unaffected by the argument. Paul's careful *oude, oude, kai* tells me, like my brother, I am not invisible and my gendered personhood in Christ matters. Our equality in Christ Jesus is not a thing to be grasped at, fought over, proven and made the standard-bearer of our rights for women or for men—not if we are talking about the kingdom of God and our partnership in the gospel.

To have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5 ff.), to think like Jesus, to be like Jesus, to engage in  ministry like Jesus does not mean to fight for one's own right to exercise one's own gifts—it means to notice and open doors for the exercise of another's gifts for the benefit of the Church and the good of the world. To have the mind of Christ means to be a self-emptying person

for the sake of the other. When taken seriously, kenotic theology is bound to be unpopular because, as Paul clearly shows throughout the Philippian epistle, all must lose in order for Christ to truly win. Paul challenged the church in Philippi, and in particular Euodia and Syntyche (4:2-3), to count it all rubbish, to count it all loss like he had learned to do (3:7-11). This may be particularly costly for women in the evangelical church today. As a Trinitarian theologian I staunchly affirm that God's self-revealed identity as Father and Son and Spirit are non-negotiable terms. I also assert that gender-accurate translation regarding the human family honors the Lord, the text, and the Church. (Holding these two ideas together in one's life and discipline is akin to being a womb-to-tomb pro-life advocate. One is rendered politically homeless in the United States, but it does foster a watchfulness for the kingdom to come.)

What would a community of faith (or a marriage!) look like if it gave itself to Paul's kenotic mandate for ecclesial life and really reflected the *ouk eni* and *oude, oude, kai* pattern of Pauline scripture? What would happen if people championed each other's gifts, worked for the other's benefit, and heralded each other's opportunity? What would the excellence of our ministry look like if we stewarded our invitations as surprising privileges instead of negotiated rights? What would happen if our language reflected all whom God intended to hear and obey? We just might make Paul's joy complete, become a community of real saints, be filled with the Spirit, look like Jesus, and bless the Father's heart! We might actually be able to get on with the mission of the Church in the world if we quit arguing over our own turf!

For the many brothers and sisters who think there is too much to lose in risky kenosis, the gospel itself has a resounding reply to such fears. How dare we evangelicals who defend the foolishness and weakness of the Cross and explain the humiliation of the Incarnation better than anyone, consistently forget or intentionally eliminate the implications of kenotic theology in the turf wars that consume "the women's issue"? Brothers protect their power, and sisters want their share. And either nothing changes or things get worse because no one is willing to risk the very challenge of faith: to die to ourselves that we might truly live *in Christ*.

I am grateful that the benediction my husband and I chose for our wedding has also been the commitment of our marriage. I think it reflects Paul's longing for Philippi and the churches in Galatia, and God's hope for the Body of Christ. I commend it as both the starting point and the end result of our current conversation.

> May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
>
> *Romans 15:5-6*

## NOTES

1 Parts of this essay are borrowed from my paper "Gender, Grace and a Greek Conjunction," *Themelios: An International Journal for Theological and Biblical Studies* 32:1 (2006), 57-59. I thank the editor for permission to use the material.

2 I refer to Kevin J. Vanhoozer, the Blanchard Professor of Theology at Wheaton College, who was research professor of systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School from 1998-2009.

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# Women in Ministry: Beyond the Impasse

BY GRETCHEN E. ZIEGENHALS

**While most Christians agree that women should be allowed to exercise their God-given gifts of ministry, a sticking point between egalitarians and complementarians is whether certain leadership roles are off limits to women. Both sides want to reach consensus, but are unsure of how to bridge the gap.**

Do we still need to question the role of women in ministry? The answer is "yes" for many conservative evangelical Christians. For them, the issues surrounding women in congregational ministry still provoke heated biblical, theological, and ecclesiological debate. Despite the fact that we have women serving in even the highest offices of government, evangelicals continue to examine Scripture in search of answers to questions about women in ministry that are plaguing conservative congregations and seminaries. The issue came to a head in 2000, when the Southern Baptist Convention adopted the revised *2000 Baptist Faith & Message*. To Article VI on "The Church" the statement was added: "While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture." Article XVIII on "The Family" (which had been added in 1998) included this interpretation of women's role in the home: "A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation."[1]

What exactly is it about women in ministry that provokes such debate? And what are the arguments for preventing women from serving in churches? While most evangelicals agree that women should be allowed to exercise their God-given gifts of ministry, the sticking point seems to be whether or not particular leadership roles are off limits to women. Some evangelicals have taken what they are calling an "egalitarian" position on the issues of women in church leadership, while others assume a "complementarian" one. Both sides want to reach some consensus on the issue, but are unsure of how to bridge the gap.

*Complementarians* believe that men and women have been created equally in God's image, but have different, complementary, God-ordained roles in both Church and home. They also believe in male headship in the Church and the home and they believe that men should mirror God the father, whom they see as loving, wise, protective and all-knowing. For complementarians, there are *essential* differences between men and women that dictate their roles. *Egalitarians*, on the other hand, believe that not only have men and women been created equally in God's image, but they have been *gifted* equally as well. No role or position in the church is limited to just one gender. Marriages are rooted ideally in negotiation, consensus, and mutual submission, not headship. They think that exclusive male leadership in the Church and home represses women and can at times lead to abuse.

Margaret Kim Peterson notes that both egalitarianism and complementarianism seem to be about the distribution of power. "The egalitarians think power should be shared fifty-fifty; the traditionalists think the distribution should be, in the memorable phrase of one of my husband's first-year Bible students, 'sixty-forty in favor of the guy'" (*Women, Ministry and the Gospel*, p. 163).

Three books help us sort through these arguments and understand the issues from evangelical viewpoints: editor James R. Beck's revised edition of *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2005, 359 pp., $17.99); Mark Husbands and Timothy Larsen's collection, *Women, Ministry and the Gospel: Exploring New Paradigms* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2007, 304 pp., $24.00); and Sarah Sumner's *Men and Women in the Church: Building Consensus on Christian Leadership* (Downers Grove: IL: IVP Books, 2003, 332 pp., $15.00). While each book takes a different approach, these three works represent thoughtful, evangelical Christians who wish to engage in rational dialogue and build consensus with one another.

*Two Views on Women in Ministry* offers the most cohesive, focused format with which to approach the issues. A part of Zondervan's Counterpoints: Exploring Theology series, its four contributors are all evangelical

New Testament scholars who hold seminary faculty positions. These similarities eliminate other variables from the discussion and help us focus on the scriptural texts that support or refute each position. Two of the scholars—Craig S. Keener (Palmer Theological Seminary) and Linda L. Belleville (Bethel College)—consider themselves to be egalitarians, while two of them—Thomas R. Schreiner (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) and Craig L. Blomberg (Denver Seminary)—self-identify as complementarians. After each of the four major essays, in which one of the authors lays out his or her scriptural justifications, the other three respond briefly.

While the authors' approaches are scholarly and focus on the exegesis of specific passages in question such as 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 or 1 Timothy 2:11-15, they maintain a lively balance between energetic debate, a history of obvious friendship, and a good-natured respect for one another's positions. Beck notes in his introduction that as evangelicals still debate the issues of women in ministry, we need to forge a "Christ-honoring irenic spirit" for the conversation. In this, the book is quite successful.

Linda Belleville explains that the debate comes down to four questions: "Does the Bible teach a hierarchical structuring of male and female relationships? Do we find women in leadership positions in the Bible? Do women in the Bible assume the same leadership roles as men? Does the Bible limit women from filling certain leadership roles?" (p. 24) The authors all believe in the inerrancy of Scripture, and they all appear to be responsible scholars. Thus it is difficult to emerge with a strong sense of whose reading is the *correct* one. The book is helpful, however, for those who wish to understand more deeply the scriptural justifications for a position they already hold on the issue of women in church leadership or the position held by someone in the other camp.

Some arguments are not as well-supported as others, such as when Craig Blomberg attempts to explain that women can always do everything in a church context except whatever is the "highest authority." For instance, a woman could preach, if she was under the authority of the all-male board of elders, but if the role of pastor was the highest authority, a woman could not hold that role. He bases his arguments on facts such as women were not among the twelve disciples. Craig Keener convincingly refutes this point with a practical argument: "Sending out women on evangelistic travels, either as two women alone (regarded as unsafe) or a woman and a man (scandalous) was impractically provocative and counterproductive to the mission. For practical reasons, Jesus also chose no Gentiles (impossible) and possibly no Judeans (for geographic reasons)" (p. 186).

For a wider look at the issues, *Women, Ministry and the Gospel* offers a multidisciplinary approach that "strives to refresh the conversation" (p. 11).

The Introduction notes that while some Christians are weary of the issues, this book is for evangelicals who may be encountering questions about women in ministry for the first time, or for those who want to rethink an issue. The book offers a variety of approaches, such as Margaret Kim Peterson's lively chapter, "Identity and Ministry in Light of the Gospel: A View from the Kitchen" and James M. Hamilton Jr.'s "What Women Can Do in Ministry: Full Participation within Biblical Boundaries." Hamilton argues that "full participation in ministry" is constrained by specific, transcultural gender roles, based on his reading of the nature of gender in 1 Corinthians 11:7-9, among other texts. Peterson agrees that a discussion about the gendered division of labor is at the heart of the discussion of women and public ministry, but argues that Scripture, especially the stories in Luke 9:59-60 and Luke 10:38-42, calls us away from "bifurcated notions" of women's or men's work, and towards "a unified vision of 'the Lord's work,' to be undertaken by women and men together across a variety of continua" (p. 152).

**Timothy Larsen notes that while evangelical churches were committed to women in ministry at a time when more theologically liberal churches were not, in the last sixty years that trend has been reversed.**

Some of the freshest material in the book seems to come from Part IV, which includes materials from the perspective of the social sciences and the humanities. In this section Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen declares "a plague on all your houses!" (p. 171). She argues that neither side has understood gender properly, because "there is much more variability *within* than *between* the sexes on almost all of the trait and behavior measures for which we have abundant data" (p. 174).

In this same section, editor Timothy Larsen offers a fascinating look at the history of evangelical women in public ministry. He notes that while evangelical churches historically were committed to women in ministry at a time when more theologically liberal churches were not, in the last sixty years that trend has been reversed. For evangelicals, Larsen explains, the reasons for this reversal included the cultural tendency in the 1950s to restrict women to the private sphere, the evangelical reaction to First Wave Feminism, and a shift in how biblical evidence is weighed.

The final section of the book offers three essays that attempt to move us "beyond the impasse" and "toward new paradigms." While the book does a good job at offering new perspectives on an old conflict, it is not as successful at offering new paradigms. Henri Blocher's position is difficult to decipher. Sumner, whose book we will discuss next, is somewhat more helpful

because she attempts to "forge a middle way" between complementarians and egalitarians. As a part of this middle way she reframes the debate: "It is not a debate between conservatives and liberals. It's a debate between conservatives and *conservatives.* Those who are *not* conservatives typically have never even heard of the conservative in-house terms of c*omplementarian* and *egalitarian"* (p. 259). Timothy George has the last word of the book, proposing a new ECT or "Egalitarians and Complementarians Together." This group would, among other things, offer "testimonies of mutual conversion" (p. 285) that would help us understand why certain issues are compelling to us at different times in our lives.

The third book, *Men and Women in the Church*, is the most personal of the three. In fact, Sumner notes that *she* is the audience that her book is targeted for. The effect is that of someone who is thinking out loud, albeit with integrity and care.

Her book accomplishes several goals: first, it is an amalgam of her thoughts on women in church leadership; second, it describes moments in her vocational and spiritual journey and moments in the lives of women she has mentored and taught; third, it includes exegesis of key passages; and fourth, it offers several intriguing chapters about gender roles in both our spiritual and congregational lives.

All of these offerings are in service to her primary goal to blur the lines of the debate and to show us how complementarians and egalitarians can agree. She is loathe to come down squarely on one side or another, which can be exhausting at times for the reader, as she builds elaborate cases around scriptural texts in an effort to show how we are more similar than we think. She does point out helpfully that both groups are revising church tradition—complementarians by saying that the *worth* of men and women are equal, and egalitarians by saying that their *rights* are equal.

Sumner offers several ground rules. First, she notes that every scripture means something—and *God* knows what it means. We cannot just throw out or ignore a passage that makes no sense to us or that makes us feel uncomfortable. Second, she encourages us as we study scripture passages not to look up a word such as "weaker vessel" in the dictionary, but rather to study it in its many contexts in the Bible. Third, she argues that what the Bible says trumps tradition every time. That is, we should not look to the history of Christianity to be our guide on women's roles in the Church, but rather to Scripture. Fourth, she notes that it is God who gifts us and ultimately calls us to ministry in the Church, no matter what people think about the matter.

The most interesting material comes in chapters 6 through 8 when Sumner writes about the spiritual and vocational limits placed on women

and men in the Church by traditional gender roles. In Chapter 6 entitled "Women and Personhood," she takes a raw look at how women have been perceived and treated in many churches. She argues that too many women have been "held back" from using their God-given gifts. Sumner encourages the women she encounters not to hold back:

> A common formula for helping Christian men to feel more solid and secure is to coach Christian women to hold back. Thus many Christian women never minister to men, and thus many Christian men never are developed in the faith. Men are weakened when women hold back. Men are weakened to the point of needing all the women to hold back. (p. 94)

She acknowledges that some conservative evangelical churches have limited women's involvement by convincing them of their inferiority:

> I can confidently say that Christians in the United States generally agree that it is bad theology to say that poor people are inferior to rich ones or that blacks are inferior to whites. We also seem to agree that it is bad theology to think that children are inferior to adults. Unequivocally we believe it is even worse theology to say that God is inferior or that Christ became inferior to the Roman government on the day he was arrested and killed. And yet I cannot with confidence say that Christians generally agree it is bad theology to believe that women are inferior to men. (p. 77)

Sumner goes even further by admitting that she once held a similar view, holding men in higher esteem. Yet, she continues confessing, "Although I am a woman, I have tacitly thought of myself as a special type of woman, the kind that can keep up with men" (p. 78). While I think Sumner now believes in the equal worth of women and men, this theme of special exceptions is one that permeates complementarian thought. Although women may not have leadership roles, the theory goes, if there is an occasional woman who is talented, quiet, not angry, does not make trouble, and asks nicely, she can be an "honorary man." "It's usually no big deal if a man is surpassed by a woman who is considered to be exceptional," she writes, "The men I talked to readily agreed that it would not be bad to lose a tennis match to Steffi Graff, no matter who was on the sidelines watching" (p. 94).

Yet she begins Chapter 7, "Men and Manhood," with the words, "If Christian women have a tendency to pretend they are inferior, the opposite is true for Christian men" (p. 81). She explains that men in the Church are trained to establish their identity as higher than that of women. Criticizing biblical scholars such as John Piper for taking too narrow a view of masculinity—"'At the heart of mature masculinity,' he says, 'is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women'" (p. 89)—she outlines a vision of marriage where men and women are responsible for

their own actions and feelings. Such a marriage is based on love as revealed in Christ, not on a worldly fantasy of Zorro meets Cinderella. Discussing men's fear of being associated with anything "feminine," she notes that it is not necessary "to define masculinity in terms of leading." Rather, there is biblical evidence of women leading men and that Jesus himself "received from women." "Sometimes it is wise for a man to lead and for a woman to affirm his leadership. Sometimes it is right for a man to protect a woman and a woman to receive. But at other times," she continues, "God wills the reverse" (p. 98).

Another chapter that is particularly worthy of mention is Chapter 8, "Masculinity and Femininity." Here Sumner uses feminist analysis (though she would never describe it as such) to examine how gender stereotypes in the Church prevent us from having a good relationship with God. She shares with us how she asks her students to list definitions of masculinity and femininity from the perspectives of the world, the Christian community, nature, and the Bible. According to the stereotypes they come up with, "men have more to lose and women have more to gain from the Christian community. I wonder if this accounts, at least in part," she writes, "for the reason why men are less likely than women to attend a local church" (p. 103).

She goes on to note that women in the Church usually attend Bible studies and are prayer warriors, while men attend accountability groups. "And what is the implication? Women should know the Scriptures, and men should live the Scriptures without knowing them. Isn't that self-defeating? Men are supposed to become Bible Answer Men, and yet women are the ones at Bible Study." The result of this imbalance is that "the body of Christ is weakened" (p. 103). One group of women told Sumner that they were afraid to unleash their strength in their congregation: "We're afraid because if we get involved in church leadership, then we're likely to go overboard and take full control of the men!" (p. 104).

**There is biblical evidence of women leading men. "Sometimes it is right for a man to protect a woman and a woman to receive. But at other times," Sarah Sumner concludes, "God wills the reverse."**

But Sumner believes that "many of the norms within the Christian community are more cultural than biblical" (p. 105), and we must think of women on the battle front of the faith, just like the men. "Women of God are included in the battle of the Lord," she writes. "They don't sit on the sidelines watching the men. They wear the spiritual armor because they need it.

They're out there too, just like the men, building the kingdom of God" (p. 109). Sumner's purpose is to keep reminding us that there is a "difference between what we have been taught to think and what the Bible says is true about men and women" (p. 112). Her arguments intend to move complementarians along, while warning egalitarians that the issue is not about personal power.

The question that remains after reading these three books is: Have they moved us forward in the attempt to build consensus between egalitarians and complementarians? All three books certainly succeed in fleshing out the issues, the various ways in which we can understand what Scripture says about women in church leadership, and the extent to which Christian tradition offers resources (but mostly has not been helpful). As conservative evangelical Christians, these writers see the Bible as the ultimate authority on the issue. As a result, they could probably spend the better part of eternity debating about whose interpretation of Scripture is closer to the truth. This approach might only move the debate forward inch by inch. It is good progress that most of the writers now believe they cannot look to tradition for truths about gender roles, but the yeast with which to leaven the bread is still missing.

I would like to suggest that Christian feminism may be the elephant in the room. While many of the authors make it clear that they are rigorously opposed to feminism and view it as the great enemy of conservative evangelicals, several of them use feminist analysis as a tool with which to do their work. Openly embracing the principles of Christian feminism would help the two sides move closer to the consensus they seek.

Most of the authors operate with a highly reductive view of what feminism is. Sumner uses the terms "Christian feminist," "biblical feminist," "evangelical feminist," "radical feminist" and "secular feminist" interchangeably, without clear definitions or distinctions. Timothy Larsen's essay and several others are exceptions to this trend. Larsen carefully acknowledges that there are several versions of feminism, and he notes that one form in particular has evoked a strong reaction from evangelicals (p. 232).

In addition, almost none of these authors acknowledge that one can be a feminist and a Christian. In the Introduction to Sumner's book, for instance, Phillip Johnson reassures the readers, "She says that she is a Christian first and last, and not a feminist, and that she wants to write in furtherance of truth and Christ's power, not women's power," because he fears, "Some readers may suspect that there must be some suppressed anger or feminist power-seeking lurking in the background" (p. 5). Sumner concurs in her acknowledgments that Johnson helped her initially in her writing the book by "challenging me to first convince him that I am not a feminist (he didn't

automatically believe me at first)…" (p. 7). Her point seems to be that one cannot be a Christian and a feminist.

Yet I found it fascinating that Sumner was so adept at using the tools of feminist analysis to champion the ways in which women are created equally in God's image but not treated so in the Church. Sumner unwittingly uses feminist analysis to understand God's saving activity on earth and she does an excellent job!

Here is why I think an open embracing of a thoughtful Christian feminism would be helpful to this conversation. First, conservative evangelicals seem to do an elaborate dance around saying that women are equal. The language of "rights" seems to be too prickly for them to use, too reminiscent of the First Wave feminism of the 1960s and '70s. Yet as one author points out, this movement did gain women important advances such as equal pay and domestic violence laws. I do not think anyone in this conversation wants to go back to a time when women did not have these rights. Sumner argues that because we are Christians, we do not need to say that we are also feminists. The gospel is pro-woman, just as it is pro-man. Yet, we are sinful beings and many Christians are not pro-woman. Thus, while chauvinism is not a part of God's character, it is often a part of the fallen nature of God's people. So a conservative Christian platform that saw women and men created equally in the image of God should welcome the laws and the theories of feminism that focus on helping create a more just society on earth for both women and men.

In *Feminism and Christianity: An Essential Guide,* Lynn Japinga reminds us that "Christian feminists, like feminists of other faiths or nonreligious feminists, represent a range of positions. Evangelical feminists tend to be more conservative in their attempts to preserve traditional Christian doctrines."[2] But most feminist Christians would agree, she continues, that feminism is "a commitment to the humanity, dignity, and equality of all persons. They seek equal rights for women, but their ultimate goal is a social order in which women and men of all races and classes can live together in justice and harmony" (p. 13). We must therefore resist whatever oppresses human beings and instead empower and encourage women, she writes. "A particularly Christian approach to feminism might add that the source for these beliefs about dignity and equality is the theological assertion that all people are created in God's image and therefore are valuable, gifted, free,

**Openly embracing the principles of a thoughtful Christian feminism would help egalitarians and complementarians move closer to the consensus they seek.**

and responsible" (p. 13). It seems to me that it would be helpful for evangelical Christians to embrace this language as they continue to articulate the roles of women in the Church.

Second, if feminist Christians loved their personal rights more than the Bible, they would have thrown up their hands and left the Church long ago. Yet there are thousands of feminist Christian men and women working hard in the churches that have not always been kind to them. They work from within the Church to help keep it true to the spirit of egalitarianism that Christ embodies. Christian feminism is about more than personal power, and feminist Christians would agree with Sumner that our power is rooted in Christ.

Third, God might be using feminism to help reform the Church. Sumner writes, "Could it be that the global trends of feminism coincide with God's plan to reform the way the church treats women? After all, there is biblical precedent for God to use pagans to make his name known and act on behalf of the oppressed" (p. 55). This theme could be developed in evangelical literature, acknowledging that feminism (and certainly not all feminism is "pagan") is very biblical in its prophetic, liberating forms.

Finally, the primary gift that feminist theology can bring to this evangelical conversation would be a deliberate lifting up of women's experiences. We have already seen how the lack of exegetical consensus is frustrating for some evangelicals. One of the primary tasks of feminist theology, according to Rosemary Radford Ruether and other feminist theologians, is to recover the stories and experiences of women in order to illustrate their gifts and talents in the community. Japinga categorizes these experiences as bodily experience, socialized experience, and the experience of oppression or suffering. If the community were to lift up and listen to the experiences of women, it could glean new insights into the biblical stories and passages that guide evangelical conversations about gender.

Katherine Doob Sakenfeld notes that through the Bible "God shows women their true condition as people who are oppressed and yet who are given a vision of a different heaven and earth and a variety of models for how to live toward that vision."[3] She argues that we can look to texts about women in the Bible to understand the lives of women today, and we can look at our lives today to fill in the gaps about the experiences of biblical women. I understand more about the bent-over woman in Luke 13:10-17 and the nature of what might have oppressed her, when I consider the experiences of my grandmother, a hardworking immigrant who was bent over from years of hard work, which included hunching over a sewing machine to earn a living for her family.

Acknowledging and listening carefully to the stories of conservative evangelical women as well as other Christian women might help move the conversation between egalitarians and complementarians beyond the

impasse. Such listening might be the lever that is needed to budge the stone of consensus. But it needs to be the kind of listening that trusts that women's experiences can bring insight into our understanding of Scripture. Only such a fuller understanding that includes our lived experiences can help us see the loving and respectful relationships between women and men in the Church that God intends.

## NOTES

1 *The Baptist Faith and Message* was written in 1925, revised in 1963, amended in 1998, and revised again in 2000. A helpful comparison of these versions is available online at *www.sbc.net/bfm/bfmcomparison.asp*.

2 Lynn Japinga, *Feminism and Christianity: An Essential Guide* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 12. Further page citations will be in the text.

3 Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, "Feminist Uses of Biblical Materials," in Letty M. Russell, ed., *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1985), 55-64, here citing 62.

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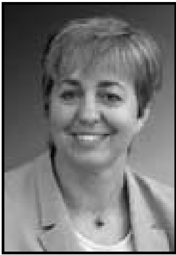

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# What Should We Say about Mary?

BY CAROLE L. BAKER

**When a great aunt asked me casually, "Why did Protestants get rid of Mary?" my silence and befuddlement marked the beginning of a longstanding fascination with Mary's role in the Christian Church. Three books reviewed here introduce the resurgent interest among Protestants in the mother of our Lord.**

In 2000, I began my seminary education at a Protestant seminary. The first semester I signed up for a course in Catholic Moral Theology. It was not because I had any particular interest in Catholic theology; I was, after all, a Protestant. But a friend I respected encouraged me to do so, and so I did. Had I been asked at that time what the significant differences were between Protestants and Catholics, I likely would have said something along these lines: Protestants do not worship Mary, and we do not think we need a pope telling us what to believe and how to live. Finally, Protestants have a personal relationship with Jesus. No mediation is required. Like most of the Protestants I knew, my identification as a Protestant mostly meant I understood what I was *not*, i.e. Catholic. And by Catholic I could only mean those few things listed above.

The course began. Thankfully it was lead by a Protestant theologian who took the texts, and Catholic tradition, seriously and therefore insisted that we do the same. Our last assignment was to read a book entitled *Mary: Mirror of the Church* by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa. When the final class session opened, the room was completely silent. This was not typical for

this group of young, eager theologians who all semester long had come to class eagerly awaiting their moment to share their profound theological insights. Finally, a young man broke the silence professing, "I just don't know what to do with Mary." This confession prompted other similar confessions and I sat in amazement as I listened to these bright, articulate Protestants attempt to convey their befuddlement when encountering the Lord's mother.

When I returned home for Christmas, just days after the semester's close, this moment still haunted me. And when my great aunt, also a Protestant, asked me casually and without any prompting at Christmas dinner, "Why did Protestants get rid of Mary?" my own silence and befuddlement marked the beginning of what has now become a longstanding fascination with Mary's role in the Christian Church.

Along the way, to my delight I discovered I was not alone. Indeed Protestants have experienced a resurgent interest in Mary for several decades now. And this resurgence of Protestant reflection on Mary has resulted in numerous theological and devotional publications. For those unfamiliar with this movement within Protestantism, and even evangelical Protestantism, the following books may be of interest.

*The Real Mary: Why Evangelical Christians Can Embrace the Mother of Jesus* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2007, 176 pp., $19.95), written by Scot McKnight, is a small book that attempts to get evangelical Protestants not only interested but also excited about Mary. Why? McKnight claims that "the Cold War between Protestants and Roman Catholics over Mary has ended." (p. 5). Moreover, he claims that a book for evangelicals about the *real* Mary has yet to be written. These are two very bold claims set forth by McKnight in the opening pages. The real Mary, for McKnight, is not the Mary taken captive by polemics. Rather the real Mary is the one we encounter when considering her "life and character." This being the case, McKnight has organized his work thematically. He draws out characteristics he believes not only describe the real Mary, but with which his readers can sympathize and hopefully come to identify themselves in relation to the estranged mother of our Lord.

The chapter subtitles tell us Mary is a "Woman of Faith," "Woman of Justice," "Woman of Danger," and so on. All of this builds up to his conclusion that "This real Mary, the one who struggled to embrace Jesus' mission, is no offense to Protestants, but rather she is a woman for us to honor." And from here McKnight concludes with his characteristic boldness "calling for an event: a single day in each local Protestant church" which he suggests should be called "Honor Mary Day" (p. 144). Again, whether or not you are convinced by the end of the book to initiate such a day at your local church,

you will likely end up with a greater appreciation for the idea due to McKnight's labor of love. However, should you be convinced, McKnight provides an appendix filled with resources to help you organize a day in honor of the *real* Mary.

The zeal that marks his opening pages remains consistent throughout the book. Whether or not one is fully sympathetic with McKnight's exuberance, readers will find a sincerity and, as McKnight often puts it, a "fairness" that makes this book an enticing read. For those new to the conversation, this is a good place to start.

*Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002, 158 pp., $24.95), edited by Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby, is a well compiled collection of essays written by thoughtful Protestants who have attempted to take seriously Mary's role in the Christian tradition and life of faith. The Foreword, written by Kathleen Norris, sets the tone: "If Mary points us beyond our traditional divisions, ideologues of all persuasions—conservative and liberal, feminist and anti-feminist—have long attempted to use Mary to argue their causes, with varying degrees of success. But Mary ultimately resists all causes" (p. x). This is a significant remark to have in mind as you work your way through the collection, as even here the writers represent a diverse range of perspectives on Mary that at times may say more about the ideological persuasion of the writer than Mary. This is not to say such persuasions are not a worthwhile exploration, and, in fact, these explorations exemplify the ways in which Mary continues to shape Christian thought and spirituality among Protestants. But, as Norris suggests, we are wise to recognize Mary's resistance to our causes.

The editors have organized the collection to include three major sections: "Encountering Mary," "Living Mary," and "Bearing Mary." In their Introduction they offer a brief rationale for each section which proves helpful and may in fact be worth revisiting as a framework for the reader's own reflection. What becomes clear in the Introduction, and is revisited and at times accentuated throughout the collection, is that this book is intentional in providing a *Protestant* picture of Mary. Though at times this emphasis comes across as an anti-Catholic sentiment, specifically related to Mariological doctrines, the editors express a desire for unity in the Church which they feel may be aided through the recovery of Mary's presence within Protestantism. They write, "The absence of Mary not only cuts Protestants off from Catholic and Orthodox Christians; it cuts us off from the fullness of our own tradition. We have neither blessed Mary not allowed her to bless us" (p. 2).

The first section, "Encountering Mary," provides reflection on Mary's role in the Gospels. Most writers note the seemingly minor role Mary plays if one only looks at the number of appearances she makes. But nonetheless, in spite of her slight presence in the written accounts, these writers find plenty from which to draw out the scriptural witness to Mary's significance. For example, in her essay, "Who Is My Mother?" E. Elizabeth Johnson finds Mary's "marginal" role in Mark's Gospel to be indicative of the underlying theological claims Mark wants to make about the radical redefinition of family initiated in Christ's death and resurrection. She writes, "The narrative of Mark marginalizes the figure of Jesus' mother in the same way that it relativizes and redefines all domestic relations within the Christian community" (p. 33).

Mary's participation in the redefining of roles comes up again in the second section of the book. In the essay "Ignored Virgin or Unaware Women: A Mexican-American Protestant Reflection on the Virgin of Guadalupe," Nora O. Lozano-Díaz reflects on traditional associations of oppressive characteristics attributed to Mary, and therefore also with the Virgin of Guadalupe, insofar as her submission to God's will has been translated culturally into the perpetuation of patriarchal views of women's submission to men. Interestingly, Lozano-Díaz suggests this unfair association of Mary with women's oppression is best confronted with a biblical view of Mary that, when read with a feminist sensibility, reveals "an active and assertive woman who made her own choice" when approached by God through the angel (p. 93). Moreover, the Magnificat serves to further display the courage this young woman had in order to carry out God's will, despite the potential dangers it would involve. The biblical Mary, she insists, is not a woman of disempowered passivity.

There are serious implications for recovering Mary for Protestants and many are touched on in this rich collection. For this reason it will be a helpful read for those who have already begun to rediscover Mary, as well as those who are just beginning to notice her absence.

In order for Protestants to truly take seriously Mary's role in Protestant faith, it will be important to do this in light of a broader historical and theological perspective. This observation is addressed and partially met in Tim Perry's *Mary for Evangelicals: Toward an Understanding of the Mother of Our Lord* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006, 320 pp., $24.00). In his Foreword for the book, William J. Abraham rightly points out that any deep theological reflection on Mary cannot avoid leading to serious theological reflection on many other matters that distinguish Protestants from both Catholic and Orthodox Christians. Perry's book does not shy away from this

reality and instead faces it head on by offering a rather straightforward historical retracing of Christian thought regarding Mary. Of course, a historical retracing is also a theological retracing, and as such readers will have the opportunity to engage material from the early centuries of Christian theology. These are the centuries, some Protestants may not be aware, before there was a "Catholic Church." Indeed, one of the great gifts of Perry's work is that it serves as a helpful introduction to the Church's history and struggles to not only understand Mary, but Mary in light of Jesus Christ. Indeed, the earliest arguments regarding Mary were inextricably linked to arguments regarding Christ. And in many cases, it is these and related arguments that continue to resurface when Protestants begin taking Mary seriously. Therefore, so that we do not deceive ourselves in thinking these are "new" questions, Perry provides a historical framework through which we can continue to work out what is at stake with regards to Mary. In his final chapters, where he lays out his argument for an evangelical recovery of Mariology, he states, "If the preceding argument is valid, Mariology is not by definition unbiblical and need not justify or culminate in impiety. The question then remains where to begin. There are several possible places—all of them ancient" (p. 269).

**We think we need to say something ABOUT Mary, rather than TO Mary. A proposal: why don't we begin with the first words spoken both TO and ABOUT Mary from God's own messenger, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."**

From here Perry goes on to make his own contribution in the long lineage of Christian reflection and theologizing on Mary. Here is where the previous "introductory" character of Perry's work ends. What Perry does in the concluding chapters to his book can only make sense in light of what he has laid out before, but even for the attentive reader Perry's own construction of an evangelical Mariology will not be easily digested. It is a careful and painstaking attempt to push evangelical reflection on Mary far beyond its usual confinement to oversimplified characterizations and dismissals of Mariological doctrines. Perry does not want this to be easy; if it were easily obtained it could be easily lost. Working through these final chapters, one becomes keenly aware of the complexities and implications of what Perry is proposing. No less a labor of love than Scot McKnight's proposal for an evangelical honoring of Mary, Perry's arduous theological exposition exudes a sobering passion for the same. You cannot walk away from this book without taking it, and Mary, very seriously.

Only time will tell if the current buzz about Mary among Protestants will produce any fruit. In the meantime, we might do well to inquire what that fruit might be. How will we know it when we see it? Where do we look?

Apart from the historical and theological debates surrounding her role in Christian life and worship, there is another history I have discovered that is much harder to bring into scholarly reflection about Mary. That is to say, there is a history of Christians whose experience and knowledge regarding Mary has not come primarily through rational assent to doctrines or dogmas, but rather through a relationship. The idea of relationship is certainly not new to Protestants. In fact, the relational character of Protestant faith is something we have unfortunately used to define ourselves over and against our Catholic and Orthodox brothers and sisters. And yet, it is precisely this relational aspect that is missing from so much Protestant writing about Mary. In fact, throughout much of the literature, reviewed here and elsewhere, Protestants seem to resist this most of all. Such resistance often comes in the form of Mary being turned into a metaphor, or a mere example, that Protestants can find "useful" for reflection on their own life. When this happens, when we too quickly appeal to her "usefulness," we deny ourselves even the possibility of relating to her as the Mother of God.

What should we say about Mary? Perhaps the challenge is implicit in the question; that is, we think we need to have something to say *about* Mary, rather than having something to say *to* Mary. A proposal: why don't we begin with the first words spoken both *to* and *about* Mary from God's own messenger, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28)? If we offer this as an address, rather than a theological proposition, we might begin to understand more fully what it means to honor Mary.

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