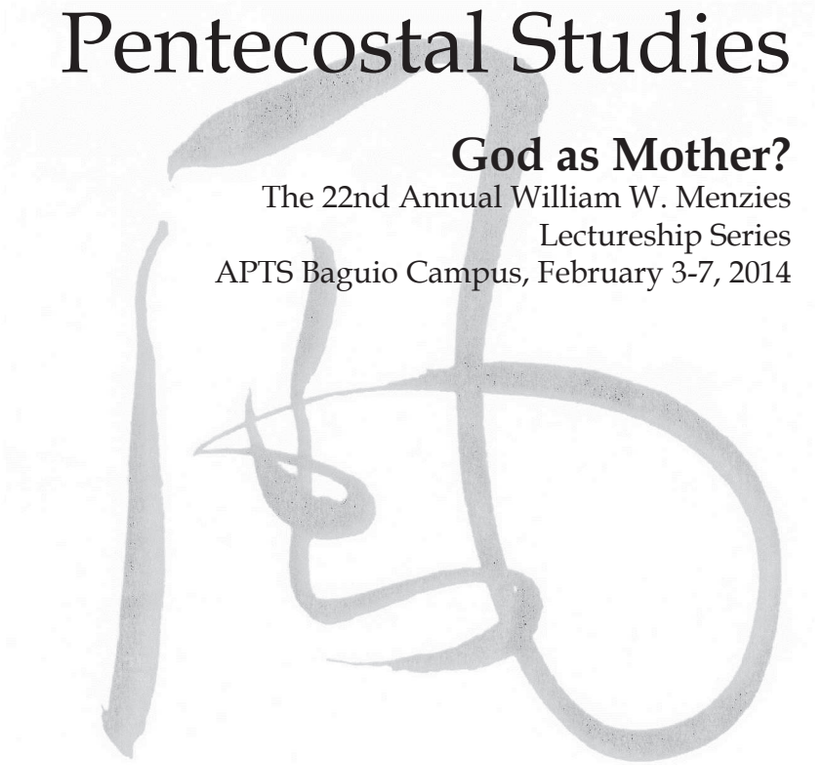
Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies

God as Mother?

The 22nd Annual William W. Menzies
Lectureship Series
APTS Baguio Campus, February 3-7, 2014



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Volume 17, Number 2 (August 2014)

EDITORIAL

ARTICLES

BOOK REVIEW

[*AJPS* 17:2 (2014), pp.105-106]

God as Mother?

The title of this edition will likely raise some eyebrows. Indeed, it is intentionally provocative to intentionally bring to light a neglected and somewhat controversial subject. No, APTS has not bought into feminist theology. But our intent here is to think of God in ways that perhaps we have never before seen in Scripture. As you will see in the articles that follow, the biblical writers repeatedly ascribed attributes to God that, depending on one's cultural viewpoint, would be normally be the domain of the feminine gender. Does this mean that God is a female? Again, the answer is no. He is, as Tim Bulkeley repeatedly describes in the following articles, *sui generis*, wholly other than anything else in the created order. In other words, he is beyond gender.

All of the articles in this edition were papers presented at the 22nd Annual William W. Menzies Lectureship Series that was held on February 3-7, 2014, on our Baguio campus. The main speaker was Dr. Tim Bulkeley, a freelance instructor in theology from New Zealand. Because these were originally given as lectures, the editors opted to maintain lecture style here in order to ensure that his voice comes through clearly. To accomplish this, we allowed a bit more of the first person usage than we would normally do.

In the first article, Bulkeley sets the stage for the entire series. He roots the idea of God as mother in the theology of creation, giving specific attention to the cultural context of the ancient Near East and moving to the conclusion that while Jesus was incarnated as a Jewish male, the second person of the Trinity and, for that matter, the entire Godhead, are beyond race and gender. In the second article, he goes to great lengths to demonstrate that God is *sui generis*, wholly other. He goes on to deal with many of the biblical passages that reveal God's maternal qualities, normally using picture language to do so, but always keeping in mind that the concepts of God as father and mother connote relationship, not gender.

In the third lecture, he moves on to discuss how Jesus saw God as his "Father" and the tremendous impact it had on those who heard him

use this term. Bulkeley also details the dangers of using picture language and some of the erroneous teachings that can happen as a result of inappropriate usage. The fourth lecture is dedicated to an extensive review of God as mother theology in the first one and a half millenniums of the Christian Church. In the final lecture, Bulkeley comes full circle moving from the theological aspects to challenging us to experience God as mother.

Three other papers were also presented, two of which are published here. The third, given by Dr. Kim Snider, will be published in the next edition of our Journal.

My article was focused on understanding the implications of discipleship in the animistic Philippine context, focusing in on the aspects of supernatural healing. This is particularly relevant as Filipinos tend to give their allegiance to the entity that brings healing, normally without questioning the source of power from which it comes.

The final article is written by the Rev. Saw Tint Sann Oo, an APTS alumnus who is director of a Bible college in his homeland, Myanmar. Here, he traces the positive impact that the Bible schools in that country have had on the growth and development of the Assemblies of God churches in his homeland and demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between training leaders and planting churches.

As always, I'd be delighted to hear from you. You can contact me through our website, www.apts.edu.

In Grace,

David M. Johnson, D-Miss
Managing Editor

[*AJPS* 17:2 (2014), pp. 107-118]

GOD AS MOTHER? IDEAS TO CLARIFY BEFORE WE START

By Tim Bulkeley

Who is God? Almost everyone I talked to before the lecture series, *God as Mother?*, referred to the topic as "interesting." Interesting is an interesting word; it has two meanings. The dictionary definition concerns things we find of interest or attractive, but the other implies something that is on the fringe or odd. So my prayer is that through these lectures I can demonstrate that the topic is interesting in the good sense and not in the bad sense.

Starting at the Beginning: Genesis 1

Starting at the beginning always makes sense, but with a potentially controversial topic like this it makes even more sense. Since my topic concerns talking and thinking about God, "the beginning" is the question: Who is God? If we do not begin by sharing a common understanding of the nature of God, then we risk misunderstanding each other in all of our conversation.

In the case of the biblical understanding of God, "the beginning" really is the beginning. The Bible's understanding of God is first made clear in the first book of the Bible. Genesis 1 is not the first chapter of Scripture by accident or merely because of chronology but because it lays the foundations on which the Bible is built. This chapter is familiar to all Christians, and therefore we may not notice one of the most important things that it would have communicated to ancient hearers. It may help us at this stage to consider the origin stories[1] that were known from the ancient Near East. While we do not have access to the ancient Canaanite origin stories, it is likely that they were similar to the stories of ancient Mesopotamia. We do know that a copy of the story of the hero Gilgamesh was found in the land that is now Israel, when it was

[1]I am using the phrase "origin story" instead of "creation story" because, as we will see, except in Israel these stories did not describe creation so much as the originating of the world.

Canaanite country before arrival of the Israelites in the land.[2] We also know they would have been aware of the Egyptian origin stories from their time in Egypt before Moses.

Perhaps the best known, and one of the most important, Babylonian origin stories is called *Enuma Elish*. This name comes from its first words. It begins: "when on high," *enuma elish* in Akkadian.[3] The story involves fighting among the gods, and one god, Marduk, who in the end becomes the king of the remaining gods by defeating and killing his rivals. In particular he defeats and slays Tiamat (the ocean deeps), and cutting her in half, Marduk uses the body to make the land and the sky. As the story continues we discover that each god has his or her own specialties.[4]

To illustrate what such stories said about the gods at their centre, here is how Marduk is introduced:

I: 79-103
Then, in the Palace of Fates.
Then. in the Temple of Destinies.
The most ingenious divine warrior was created.
The ablest and the wisest of the divine warriors.
Then, in the Heart of Apsu,
Then, in the sacred Heart of Apsu
Marduk was created.
Ea was his father.
Damkina, his mother.
Divine the breasts from which he nursed,
Nurtured with care and endowed with glory.
Marduk's posture was erect.
His glance inspiring.
Marduk's stride was commanding.
His stature venerable.
His grandfather Anu's face beamed,
His heart filled with pride.

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[2]See, e.g. Herbert Mason, *Gilgamesh: A Verse Narrative* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003), 118. This evidence makes it (not certain but) likely that the most popular Mesopotamian stories were known in Canaan when Abraham arrived (from Mesopotamia) and when Joshua led the Israelites into the land again.

[3]Patrick V. Reid, *Readings in Western Religious Thought: The Ancient World* (Mawah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 4.

[4]The story is available in various translations e.g. *ibid.* and also online e.g. http://www.sacred-texts.com/ane/enuma.htm.

He declared Marduk flawless,
His father endowed him with a double share of divinity.
Marduk surpassed all of his ancestors. . . .[5]

The Egyptian stories are varied, according to the city in which they were told and which god "belonged" there. So in Memphis the story centres on Ptah, god of artisans, who designs the other gods including Atun, while in Heliopolis Atun is the source from whom the other powers come. In the end, though they all make one God primary, they feature a multiplicity of gods and powers, and also relate creation intimately and physically to the god(s).[6]

> . . .[Thus] it happened that it was said of Ptah: "He who made all and brought the gods into being." He is indeed Ta-tenen, who brought forth the gods, for everything came forth from him. Nourishment and provisions, the offerings of the gods, and every good thing. Thus it was discovered and understood that his strength is greater than (that other other) gods. And so Ptah was satisfied.[7] After he had made everything, as well as all the divine order. He had formed the gods. He had made cities. He had founded nomes. He had put the gods in their shrines, (60) he had established their offerings, he had founded their shrines, he had made their bodies like that (with which) their hearts were satisfied. So the gods entered into their bodies of every (kind of) wood, of every (kind of) stone, of every (kind of) clay, or any-thing which might grow upon him, in which they had taken form.[8]

There are fascinating similarities here to the biblical account, not least the detail that having finished the work of creation Ptah was satisfied or rested, but despite these similarities, and even despite the Hymn to Ptah's serene tone compared to the Mesopotamian account, the difference in the type of "theology" is striking. Not least when the next lines reveal the concern with earthly politics that has driven this

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[5]Victor Harold Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East* (Paulist Press, 2006), 13.

[6]David Adams Leeming, *Creation Myths of the World: An Encyclopedia* (ABC-CLIO, 2010), 102–106.

[7]Or, "so Ptah rested."

[8]James Bennett Pritchard and Daniel E. Fleming, *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton University Press, 2011), 2.

account "So all the gods, as well as their *ka's* gathered themselves to him, content and associated with the Lord of the Two Lands."[9] Memphis (Ptah's city) had recently become the capital of both Upper and Lower Egypt.

Like almost all the origin stories of the time, this one involved many gods, each with his or her own power, who fight and struggle, and out of these conflicts (often overt, sometimes under the surface), and out of the gods' bodies, the world and its politics and rulers comes to be.

In contrast Genesis 1 begins: "*bereshit bara' 'elohim*," literally "in beginning Elohim created" there are several aspects of this phrase that are gramatically strange and difficult as Hebrew (and scholars have fun arguing about them) but, for a non-Israelite who understood Hebrew, the strangest thing, was the use of *'elohim*. The word is plural in form, and can mean "gods." We can see it used that way in e.g.: Exodus 18:11, 20:3, 22:19, 23:13; Deuteronomy 5:7, 31:18, 31:20 (and many others); Joshua 24:2,16; Judges 2:12, 17, 19, 10:13; 1 Samuel 4:8, 8:8, 26:19, 1 Kings 9:6, 9; 11:4, 10, 14:9; 2 Kings 5:17, 17:35, 37, 38, 22:17; 2 Chronicles 2:4, 28:25, 34:25; Psalms 86:8; Jeremiah 1:16 (and several others); Hosea 3:1. So '*elohim* looks and sounds plural and is sometimes used as a plural meaning gods or the gods. But in Gen 1 (and its most frequently in the Bible) it is used as a singular (seen in the first words by the verb, *bara'* which is singular not plural). In this chapter it refers to the one, unique, "Gods" who brings the world to be, not in combat with other powers, still less from their bodies or from his own, but simply by expressing the desire that it be so. "Let there be light, and there was light" *yehi 'or, vayehi-'or* (Gen 1:3).

In Genesis 1 *'elohim "*Gods" is aggressively singular. All through the chapter there is only one actor. As Longman summarizes it: "The purpose of the [Genesis] creation texts, when read in the light of alternative contemporary accounts, was to assert the truth about who was responsible."[10]

When the sun, moon and stars are created (they were prominent gods in the ancient pantheons) they too appear simply on command, and they have two purposes:

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[9]Ibid., 3.

[10]Tremper Longman, *How to Read Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005), 79.

> 14 And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years,
> 15 and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. (Gen 1:14-15)

They offer a sort of calendar, telling people "times and seasons," like the agricultural and liturgical calendars i.e. when to sow and plant, and when to worship. They also provide light upon the earth and, therefore, are merely luminaries (things that give light) and signs of the calendar, not gods. These "gods" are creatures. Hamilton sums it up:

> Few commentators deny that this whole chapter has a strong anti-mythical thrust. Perhaps in no other section - except the sixth day - does this polemic appear so bluntly as it does here. It is sufficient to recall the proliferation of astral deities in most Mediterranean religions: the sun. the moon. and the stars are divine. As such they are autonomous bodies. Around each of them focus various kinds of religious cults and devotees. In the light of this emphasis Gen. l:l4ff. is saying that these luminaries are not eternal; they are created, not to be served but to serve. That is the mandate under which they function.[11]

But Westermann's classic statement is pithier: "The utter creatureliness of the heavenly bodies has never been expressed in such revolutionary terms."[12] The *'elohim* of the opening chapter of Genesis is one and unique, not one of many but one of a kind. There is no other like God. Not other gods, and not humans. The Bible keeps repeating this, there is none like God, neither "gods" nor humans may be classed with God (e.g. Dt 33:26; Ps 86:8; Jer 10:6 cf. Num 23:19; Job 9:23; Hos 11:9). God is *sui generis*[13] not to be included as a member of any class or group of beings.

This was gradually discovered by the patriarchs (stories like Rachel stealing her father's "household gods" in Gen 31 reveal that this

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[11]Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 127.

[12]Claus Westermann, *Creation* (London: SPCK, 1974), 44.

[13]A Latin phrase meaning "of its own sort" that is: the only one of its kind, which is used when we want to make sure the word "unique" is fully understood and not minimized into meaning just special or rare.

understanding did not come naturally to them) and it was taught clearly by Moses and summed up in Israel's statement of faith, the *shema'*: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone" *shema' yisra'el yhwh 'elohenu yhwy 'echad* (Dt 6:4) more literally "Hear, Israel: YHWH is our 'elohim, YHWH is alone/one."

Israel was called to declare that "Yahweh is our *'elohim* and Yahweh is one/only/alone." The God of the Bible is not "a god." He is indeed one and only, incomparable with all other beings, *sui generis*.[14]

God or the Gods

Yet, of course, Israel was "only human" and the Bible stories reflect this, time and again the Israelites slipped back into the old ways of thinking, they personified powers alongside God, or pictured God as being like one of the gods. The story that epitomizes this regular lapsing back into polytheism is found in 1 Kings 18 where Elijah calls out the 400 prophets of Baal and challenges them to a contest which will demonstrate who is *'elohim*. As he puts it talking to the people: "If the LORD is 'elohim, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." (1Kgs 18:21) But, of course, this story is only one episode. The history of Israel told in the books that begin at Judges and end with the telling of the exile in Kings, recording Israel's apostasy time and again.

In Judges we read how God raised up leaders to free Israel (or some of the tribes) from foreign rule. As a result Israel returns to serving YHWH alone, but with the peace and prosperity that follow, Israel gradually forgets and begins to serve gods and again becomes subservient to foreign nations.

In the book of Kings we frequently read of royalty who either place or remove the Asherah poles from the temple (1 Kings 15:13; 23:4; 2 Kings 18:5; 23:4, 6-7, 14-15; cf. 1 Kings 14:15, 23; 16:33; 21:7; 2 Kings 13:6; 17:10, 16; 21:3, 7). These Asherah poles were symbols of a mother goddess. She is known in Akkadian texts and in Canaanite texts found at Ras Shamra, where she is the wife of *'el* and mother of other gods.

All through the history of the kingdoms we know that time and again there was a goddess worshiped in the Jerusalem temple alongside Yahweh. Time and again prophets and faithful kings kept calling Israel back to worship the one and only. We also know from Jeremiah that

[14]A useful Latin phrase used as a technical term say that someone/thing is in a class or group of its own and not like anything else.

some Israelites worshipped a goddess known as the "Queen of Heaven" alongside Yahweh (e.g. Jer 7:18; 44:17-19, 25).[15]

Archaeology tells us much the same thing, but focuses our attention even more on the popular idea that Yahweh had a wife. A couple of inscriptions talk of Yahweh's wife. On the best known, found at Kuntillet 'Ajrud (in the Sinai Peninsula), the writing reads: "I have blessed you by Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah." All across the land of Israel many small female figurines have been found made of baked clay; they are almost certainly representations of a goddess. The prevalence of these figurines may well indicate the popularity of the goddess among ancient Israelites, despite the clear teaching that Yahweh was one and could not be associated with another beside him.[16]

The Bible time and again makes clear that since the rebellion of the first couple in Genesis 3. Humans are weak and foolish and often make mistakes. Unlike most ancient writings, Scripture does not hide this weakness, or the foolishness and sin of even the greatest heroes. Think of David. As well as his love of God and his skill as warrior and king, we read of his lust and sin. Similarly the Bible does not portray the chosen people, Israel, as always faithful to their calling, but admits and describes their apostasy.[17]

So, people ask: Why were some of the Israelite Kings, and even more so the writers of the Bible, so opposed to the idea that Yahweh, the god of the Israelites, should have a wife? After all, the kings of every ancient pantheon had a goddess as their queen consort. And that is precisely the problem. A god needs a goddess otherwise he cannot produce children. To speak of Asherah as Yahweh's wife is to make Yahweh a god, no longer unique or only, but one of a group of deities. The opposition of the Bible writers to Yahweh's wife is not, as some feminists have suggested, because they did not like women, or feared them, but rather because since Yahweh was not male, Yahweh could not have been married.

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[15]See e.g. Judith M. Hadley, *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah: Evidence for a Hebrew Goddess* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2000) especially ch. 3.

[16]This archaeological evidence has been much discussed, William G. Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?: Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Eerdmans, 2005) presents the issues at length.

[17]See e.g.: Leland Ryken et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998) article "Hero/Heroine," 378-82.

There could not be, for the writers of the Bible, a Mrs Yahweh, because there was no Mr Yahweh. Yahweh was not male, because if "he"[18] were, that would mean "he" was a member of one class of beings and not *sui generis.* A god who is paired with a goddess is not *'echad* one/only but is merely one among many.

The history of ancient Israel is the history of a people who being "only human" kept getting it wrong, acting as if Yahweh were merely a god, and needed a wife. The Bible in contrast to ancient Israel cannot accept this, because Yahweh is *'echad* the one and only, neither male nor female. The one true God is not to be compared with any other.

Grammar and Gender

In discussing this topic, as indeed in all our talk about God, we have a problem if we speak English. Languages like English use gender to identify the sex of people and animals. Some languages also ascribe gender to things, so in French a door is "she" - *la porte*, while a port is a "he" - *le port*. The way in which grammatical gender is not the same as biological sex is clear if we listen to a French-speaker talking about a man as a "person," since "*personne*" in French is feminine (even though the man in question is masculine), they would use the pronoun "*elle*" she. Similarly even if they were talking about the dean and the dean is "*le doyen*," a women, they should use the pronoun "*il*," he. Tagalog, the national language in the Philippines, like many African languages, does not use gendered pronouns. This would make it easier to talk about God without making the mistake of suggesting that God is of one sex or the other.

English is at one extreme in this since there are three genders, two of them used for animals and people that are sexed, he and she, and one for inanimate objects, it.[19] But for an English speaker to use "it" suggests an inanimate object (inappropriate for God, whom the Bible calls "the living God"), but to use "she" or "he" suggests a female or male being. If God is indeed beyond sex and gender then none of the English pronouns are really appropriate. Various writers and speakers

[18]In talking about this topic, indeed in all our talk about God we have a problem if we speak English. Languages like English use gender to identify the sex of people and animals. Some languages also ascribe gender to things so in French a door is "she" *la porte*, while a port is a "he" *le port*.

[19]Occasionally objects, most often boats and other vehicles, are spoken of as gendered.

try to overcome this in different ways, e.g. by writing "s/he" or by trying to avoid pronouns when speaking of God. These seem difficult to me so I am using "he" and putting the pronoun in "scare quotes" to indicate that it is problematic.

We Only Believe in One Less God

It is this mistake, reducing God to a god, that leads to one of the atheist's silliest arguments. "Do you believe in Zeus?" they ask. "No," you say. "What about Juno?" "No," you reply getting frustrated, "I don't believe in any gods, except one, there is only one God." "There" says the atheist triumphantly, "you don't believe in gods, I just don't believe in one more god than you don't believe in."[20] This argument is silly because it misses the basic point of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim theology, it mistakes god and God. A god, that is to say a being who is one of a group of powers, like or unlike others in various ways, is not the same as the one, only, God. God, the maker of everything, is not like or unlike any other. God is wholly other.[21]

Negative or Analogical Theologies

This makes life difficult for theologians. Because if God is not like anyone else, then how can we talk about God? One technical answer is called apophatic theology or the *via negativa* (the negative way). This means restricting ourselves to saying what God is not. In theory, by describing all that God is not, the hole that is left in the middle is God. Most ordinary people do not find this approach attractive. We prefer to say what God is like and find the filling-in-the-boundaries approach difficult to imagine. The problem with the God-is-like approach (*via analogica* or cataphatic theology) is that each of the "likes" that we may choose is partly true and partly untrue. For example, if we say that God is like a rock, this is partly true. God is strong. He is also indeed a fortress and protection. Yet, God is not hard and unyielding, nor is God formed in a volcano. If we say that God is like a mother bear protecting

[20]Actually the classic formulation of this argument was found in Stephen F. Roberts' email signature: "I contend we are both atheists, I just believe in one less god than you do." see: Dale McGowan, *Atheism For Dummies* (Wiley, 2013).

[21]This helpful term was introduced by Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*. London; New York: H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1923.

her cubs, this also is partly true and partly untrue. God is protective of those he loves. But God is not hairy and does not have paws. All the things that we may say about God using comparisons, whether analogies or metaphors or similes, are partly right and partly wrong.[22]

Failure to recognise this problem, and to think that when we say God is like. . .that we have really described God, reduces him to an idol, to a mere god. For a god who is really like. . .is part of a group, a member of a class of beings. This is obvious if we described God as like a mother bear since a god who was really a mother bear would be part of the group of mammals. Clearly at best not God, but a god.

God and Race

Take the category of race. Human beings often make the mistake of believing that God is like them. Imperialists have nearly always assumed that God was like them. European imperialism pictured God with a white skin and straight hair, meaning that other races were somehow less like God, less fully human.[23] This is dreadful theology and a terrible sin. But it is a common temptation. It is easy for us to imagine God as being "like us." The one true God is not part of any class or group of beings. One of the greatest unfortunate results of the western missionary movement that began with William Carey in the 1700s is that intentionally and often unintentionally the idea was exported that God was a European, which is plainly untrue.

At this point it may be useful to think about how the incarnate particularity of Jesus relates to what we have been saying about the godhead. God the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is not part of any exclusive category, like race or gender. Yet the second person (the Son) is incarnate in Jesus, and as such has gender and race. Theologians have therefore borrowed an idea from Philo who distinguished the *logos prophorikos* (the uttered word) and the *logos endiathetos* (the word within) and have distinguished the *logos endiathetos* (the second person in the Trinity) and the *logos ensarkos* (the Word made flesh). Thus while Jesus (the *logos ensarkos*) was a male Jew, the Son (as second person of the Trinity is not in such ways limited to being part of

[22]See: Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley, 2011), 188ff.

[23]See e.g. Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, *Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press Books, 2012).

exclusive categories. Jesus is a Jew, but God is beyond race. Jesus is male, but God is beyond gender.

When I was a missionary in Africa, the missionary society was given collections of pictures that people could use when telling Bible stories to children. In these pictures, Jesus was portrayed with a brown skin and curly dark hair. When the pictures were shown to pastors, they said: "We cannot use these pictures, that is not Jesus, Jesus is a *mundele*!"[24] They had been brought up to believe that Jesus was a white man. In fact the brown-skinned curly dark-haired Jesus was probably more historically accurate than the fair straight-haired blue-eyed Jesus of "traditional" (Western) pictures to describe the incarnate Christ.[25] For we know that God (except when the Second Person is incarnate in human form) does not have hair or eyes. We know that God's eyes are not blue or any other colour. We know that God is not European, or Chinese. He has no race because God is '*echad* one and only. I am suggesting as the basis for this series of lectures that the same is true of gender.

God and Gender

To say that God is male, or that God is female, is just as much idolatry as to say that God is European, or to say that God is a bear! Apart from the pronouns we use like "he" and "him" which I talked about above, the other main reason that we find the claim that God is not gendered difficult is that many of our names and pictures for God are male. Since the most powerful of these is Jesus' naming of God as "father" I will devote an entire lecture to this topic. Before we get there however, I will first spend time looking at some of the passages from the Bible that use motherly language and pictures to talk about god. Later in the week, I will both show that the great theologians of the early centuries of the Christian church understood that God was not of one gender or the other, and show that they also used motherly language and pictures to talk about God. They used these motherly pictures not only of "God the father," but also of the Son, and of the

[24]*Mundele* is the Lingala word for a white person.

[25]There was a recent example of this Jesus was a white man on Fox News' *The Kelly File*, broadcast Dec 11, 2013 in the USA where the host said: "I mean, Jesus was a white man too. He was a historical figure, that's a verifiable fact. . ." (see the video clip at http://nz.news.yahoo.com/a/-/world/20299318/fox-news-host-megyn-kelly-says-jesus-and-santa-are-white/ accessed 12/13/13).

Holy Spirit. In the last lecture in the series I plan to take some of the Biblical starting points, and to use them to suggest ways in which we can explore more deeply how thinking of God as being like a mother, as well as like a father, can help us to a richer and more profound experience of God. For that is the goal of this series. I am not so much concerned with trying to cross the I's or cross the T's of your theology, but I am much concerned to enrich and deepen your experience of the one and only God.

Conclusion

But for today, we started at the beginning, with our fundamental understanding of the nature of God. The biblical God is not a god, even though one of the ways "he" is named is *'elohim* which means "gods." God, in the Bible, is one, alone, wholly other. To reduce God to a being who is a member of some exclusive class of beings, like these ones and not like those ones, is to diminish God into a god. If the being we worship is not literally "incomparable," *'echad* one/only, then we are committing idolatry, for we are worshipping some part of creation in place of the creator.

[*AJPS* 17:2 (2014), pp. 119-137]

BIBLICAL TALK OF THE MOTHERLY GOD

By Tim Bulkeley

Now I want to move on from the foundation laid in the first lecture of a biblical understanding of God, to focus on the motherly language and pictures that the Bible uses to speak about God. I will also build on the claim that the one and only God is not "a god," and should not be limited to one gender. Consideration of how the Bible uses female, as well as male, word-pictures to speak about God will continue in the third lecture.

God Without Pictures

God is *sui generis,* unlike all other beings. The Old Testament expresses this, and God helps Israel to live in conformity with it, by the prohibition on idols. The second commandment forbids even images of the true God. While all over the ancient world, gods and goddesses were sculpted and painted, the Bible refuses such pictures of God. The one and only God may only be pictured using words.

It is striking that, despite all the ways in which Israel failed to live up to their calling, the archaeological record (so far at least) contains no statue of Yahweh. To be exact I have to qualify that; at Kuntillet 'Ajrud on the edge of Israelite territory in the Sinai peninsula there is one crudely drawn picture that possibly might have been intended by the artist to represent Yahweh. But that exception is only potential, for we do not know that the picture is meant to be of Yahweh. (It depends if the wording and picture relate to one another, and they seem to be perhaps done by different people.) The artifact also does not come from a population center but from an isolated settlement in the Sinai desert. With only this possible exception, no sculpture or drawing of Yahweh has been found from Bible times. However, the Bible is full of "word pictures."

All of the people around Israel depicted their gods in statues and paintings, such pictures of Yahweh were forbidden. These gods and

goddesses, whose statues archaeologists find everywhere, are usually based on either human or animal forms. This means that they are portrayed as either male or female deities. Indeed, as well as fighting, the gods of the ancient world also had sex and produced offspring. These gods were gendered. Only the God of the Bible, the one and only, who must not be portrayed by statue or painting, could avoid being limited to one gender or the other.

As an example of how word pictures work differently from physical pictures, think of Isaiah 40. In verse 10 we have a fine picture of God as conquering warrior king, bringing the spoils of war with him in triumph. In the very next verse we read of God carrying a little lamb, tender and gentle. In sculpture or drawing such a combination is difficult to achieve, but the prophet can combine both easily in words. Now each picture is true. God is a victorious sovereign; God is also tender and gentle. Either picture alone would fail to capture anything like the full truth of God but together they come closer to the truth. Without pictures we only have the negative route to talking about God, but that negative approach is not the language of worship.

Saying God is *sui generis* sounds like an abstract philosophical idea, but it helps us to understand something of the absolute otherness of God. However, at the same time as stressing God's sovereign otherness the Bible asserts and stresses that God is person.[1] Indeed, in the Old Testament, God has a personal name, Yahweh, and God is known by "his" name. In later tradition, seeking to keep the commandment against taking God's name in vain, Israel refused to pronounce it. Before the time of Jesus, Jewish people reading the Bible would read "LORD" instead. The English Bible, and many other languages' translations also, has followed this custom. This means that we no longer know how to pronounce the consonants YHWH. Yahweh is our best guess. God's name was even abbreviated into a kind of nickname, as *Yah* or *Yahu*. We find these abbreviated versions in the exclamation "praise yah" *halleluia* (*halelu yah,* praise Yah) and in people's names like Elijah *eli yahu* or Obadiah *'obad yah*.

Therefore for the Bible to picture this unique yet personal God it needs personal word pictures. Using word-pictures (not statues or paintings) allowed the Bible writers to picture God in both male and female ways, thus avoiding limiting God to either gender. As we have

[1]Indeed Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament.* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 211 could write: "It is his personhood. . .which is involuntarily thought of in terms of human personality. . .not the spiritual nature of God which is the foundation of Old Testament faith."

seen, though, popular religion in ancient Israel was seldom as pure as biblical law required. The Bible tells us about the worship of gods alongside Yahweh, and the prophets vehemently opposed talking about Yahweh as if "he" were merely a Ba'al, a (male) god. "He" was even thought by some Israelites to need a wife.

Israel, as we know from the history recorded in the Bible and from the prophets, kept failing to live up to God's standards. They kept failing to remember that God is the one and only, unique. But we are not called to imitate Israel, rather we are called to listen to the teaching of the Bible. In the first lecture I claimed that the Bible shows us that a merely male god was not God, the one and only.

Picture Language

Without physical images, Israel painted word-pictures. But word-pictures work differently from physical images. When the writers of the Bible needed to express God's love and care, and its persistence in extreme circumstances, some of them were provoked to use motherly language and pictures to talk about God. Think of the chapters of Isaiah that begin in chapter 40. The opening words of Isaiah 40 are striking. After thirty-nine chapters largely concerned to warn that God's judgment is coming and to correct Judah's apostasy and sin, suddenly in Is 40:1 we read: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God."

Whoever wrote those words, it seems clear to me that they are addressed to Judeans in exile in Babylon, to a people who are lost, broken and who have seen God's temple destroyed. They have come to believe either that Yahweh is powerless compared to the gods of Babylon, or that Yahweh does not love them, or that they have been so bad that Yahweh has deserted them. But the prophet has been commanded, by God, in 40:1 to speak "comfort" to them.

How do you speak comfort to a people who feel either deserted by God or that God is powerless? This loving God who takes the hopeless situation of an apostate nation, punished by defeat and exile, and opens new possibilities is celebrated using the picture-language of birthing in Isaiah 42:[2]

[2]On this passage see: Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, "Like Warrior, like Woman: Destruction and Deliverance in Isaiah 42:10-*17*," CBQ 49 (1987): 560-571; or her longer treatment in Lewis M. Hopfe, *ed., Uncovering Ancient Stones: Essays in Memory of H. Neil Rich*ardson (Grand Rapids: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 17–30; Van Wijk-*Bos, Reimagi*ng God, 51–55.

> For ages, I've kept still, silent and restrained myself, like a woman in labor I'll cry out, gasp and pant. (Isaiah 42:14)

The Hebrew here adds a breathless (audible) effect to the description of panting and gasping (meaning): *'aharîsh 'et'appaq kayyôledâ 'ep'eh 'eshshom ve'esh'ap yahad*.[3] This combination vividly and powerfully speaks of the violence of the final stage of labor and contrasts it with the expectant nine months of patient waiting that preceded it. The vividness of the picture language helps prepare us for the surprising thing in verse 15. Where God "lays waste" like an army, using drought as a weapon:

> I'll waste mountains and hills, and all their greenery I'll dry up. I'll turn their streams to islands, and their pools I'll dry out.

Alone this would offer no hope to deserted exiles, but when understood as birth-pangs (verse 14) the destruction is revealed as the beginning of something new because the most striking thing about the process of birth is its violence. Something new is happening:

> I will lead the blind by a road they do not know, by paths they have not known I will guide them.
> I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground.
> These are the things I will do, and I will not forsake them. (Is 42:16)

One way to describe something new is to say it is like a blind person who has been struggling to feel their way around, who can suddenly see. Another is to say that the new thing has been born. If instead of picture language this was a statue or painting, the picture of creation as God giving birth, or talk of God birthing new possibilities, would make God into a goddess. In the Bible as a word-picture it can be alongside picturing God as father. It is important that both pictures occur (see below) else a God described as motherly might be thought of as a goddess.

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[3]R. N. Whybray, *The Second Isaiah* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), 78.

Yahweh and the Womb

Using words instead of material objects to picture God frees the Bible to connect Yahweh with births and fertility. This involvement of Yahweh in birthing is striking and ubiquitous in the Bible. "He" opens barren wombs (Gen 29:31) but also causes barrenness (Gen 20:18; 30:2; 1 Sam 1:5-6). All of the "blessings of the womb" are given by Yahweh (Gen 49:25; cf. Dt 7:13; 28:4). “He” forms in the womb (Job 31:15; Jer 1:5; Ps 1:5; 139:13; Cf. Eccl 11:5), and ensures safe delivery from the womb (Job 10: 18; Ps 71:6).[4]

This association of Yahweh and the womb is very clear in Psalm 22. Verses 9-10:[5]

> You took me from the belly.
> You kept me safe on the breasts of my mother.
> On you I was cast from the womb,
> and from the belly of my mother my God, you [are].

The first and the last word in Hebrew, as in this literal translation, is “you.” "On you" also begins the second verse. Since the “you” addressed here is God, these verses are about God and centered on God. Only nine Hebrew words are used (some words are repeated). Four of the nine speak of motherhood: "belly" (in each verse), "mother" (also in each verse), "breast" and "womb.” The story is carried by three verbs: “take,” “keep safe” and “cast.” The only other words in these verses are the pronoun “you” and "God.” Both the vocabulary and the construction of the poetry focus on motherhood, birthing and on God.

The theology is perhaps as careful as the use of language. After the trauma of birth, the safety and trust which the baby finds on the mother's breast is likened to the safety and trust the psalmist seeks in God.

The structure of this poetry focuses on the divine “you,” hinting at the enormous difference between God and the human mother. But as the verses meet, this mother and God meet, verse 9 ends with the word “mother,” and immediately the word “you” (referring to God) opens

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[4]Note that these examples are not exhaustive, but representative of many many other passages.

[5]In some Psalms, the numbering of verses in Hebrew is different from English Bibles, this is such a case. The translation used here is ugly but approximates to a word for word approach in order to reflect what is happening in the underlying Hebrew.

verse 10. Again, at the end of this verse "my mother, my god" places together the two beings who offer this peaceful security.

Yahweh Gives Birth

This close association between Yahweh and the womb is sometimes made even closer when the biblical writers speak of Yahweh giving birth. Psalm 90:2 is translated somewhat differently in different versions:

> Before the mountains were brought forth (NRSV) or born (NIV and NASB),
> or ever you had formed (NRSV) brought forth (NIV) given birth to (NASB) the earth and the world,
> from everlasting to everlasting you are god.

Here the NRSV closely follows the RSV which in turn closely followed the KJV, while the NIV, and more strikingly still the NASB, make the picture much clearer. “Bring forth” and “form” (NRSV) only hint at what is explicit in the other translations which use “born” and which speak of God who “brought forth” or “gave birth.” This more lively translation is also more correct since the verbs in Hebrew refer to birth. It is true that *yalad* might refer to the father's role, but *hul* has only the meaning: “to give birth to.”[6] Translating it “formed” is weak; the Hebrew word implies the effort and pain of giving birth.[7]

This picture of God who gives birth to the world is horribly dangerous. Several theologians, not least Elizabeth Achtemeier, recently (in response to Feminist theologians, who want to make this picture a central one) have pointed out how dangerous it is. If taken on its own, this picture associates God too closely with creatures.[8] It risks

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[6]Patrick Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 126; Julia A. Foster, “The Motherhood of God: The Use of *hyl* as God-Language in the Hebrew Scriptures,” in *Uncovering Ancient Stones: Essays in Memory of H. Neil Richardson* (ed. Lewis M. Hopfe; Winona Lake, In: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 93–102 (esp. 97–98).

[7]Marvin Tate, *Psalms: 51-100* (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 432–3

[8]Elizabeth Achtemeier, “Female Language for God: Should the Church Adopt It?,” *Transformation* 4,2 (1987): 24-30; Elizabeth Achtemeier, “Why God is Not Mother,” *Christianity Today* 37,9 (1993): 17-23; Elizabeth Achtemeier, “Exchanging God for ‘No Gods’: A Discussion of Female Language for God,” in *Speaking the Christian God: the Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism* (ed. Alvin F. Kimel; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 1-16; Elizabeth Achtemeier, “Female Language for God: Should the Church Adopt It?,” in *The*

minimizing the great gulf that separates creatures from creator. If they are right and this picture is so dangerous, how were the authors of Scripture able to take that risk? What protected them from the error?

It was precisely the fact that they were not using motherly pictures of God only. They used father, lord and other pictures alongside motherly ones. Some of these pictures, perhaps unlike the picture of God birthing the world, remind us that God is in no way part of the world. Creator God stands outside, in authority over creation. Two pictures are better than one.

God's Motherly Love

Not only is God pictured giving birth, in creation and in the renewal of hopeless situations, but God's love is often thought of as motherly. Modern Westerners think of providence as a masculine thing. In western culture, men are supposed to provide for their families. "He is a good provider" is a traditional description of a good husband and father. But this thought that providence is a masculine thing is a consequence of a money economy, and of work moving outside the home sphere. Often, and especially in traditional cultures, providing food is thought of as mothers' work. In Congo, women traditionally not only cook, but also till the soil, and care for the crops (men contribute by hunting and fishing, adding the luxury of meat). In wage economies fathers are pictured as "providing" for their families, but in more traditional contexts provision was the mother's role. The idealized wife in Proverbs 31 is not only a mother (v. 28), but she provides the food for her family:

> [14] She is like the ships of the merchant, she brings her food from far away.
> [15] She rises while it is still night and provides food for her household and tasks for her servant-girls.
> [16] She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard (Pr 31:14-16).

But she provides through commerce too:

Hermeneutical Quest: Eessays in Honor of James Luther Mays on his Sixty-fifth Birthday (ed. James Mays; Allison Park, Pa: Pickwick, 1986), 97-114; see also other authors collected in Alvin F. Kimel, *Speaking the Christian God: the Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992).

> [24] She makes linen garments and sells them; she supplies the merchant with sashes. (Pr 31:24)

Such an understanding of motherly provision lies behind Moses' argument in Numbers 11. The Israelites have been complaining about their diet. They even moan about manna, which tasted like honey cakes (Ex 16:31). The rabble want meat, and remember fondly the fine dining they enjoyed as slaves in Egypt:

> [5] We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. . . (Num 11:5)

Moses is trapped between this demanding crowd and God. In verse 9, God burned part of the camp on hearing earlier complaints. By verse 10, the people's complaining has made Yahweh angry, and Moses, the intermediary, is upset. He complains to God:

> [11]So Moses said to the LORD,
> "Why have you treated your servant so badly?
> How have I deserved this?
> You lay the weight of this whole nation on me.
> [12]Did I become pregnant with this whole nation?
> Did I give birth to them, that you say to me,
> 'Carry them in your arms,
> as a nurse carries a suckling child,
> to the land you promised on oath to their ancestors.'
> [13]Where am I to get meat to give to this whole nation?
> For they come whining to me and say,
> 'Give us meat to eat!'
> [14]I am not able to carry this whole nation alone.
> They are too heavy for me.
> [15]If this is how you are going to treat me,
> kill me at once
> (if I have found favor in your sight)
> and do not let me see my misery."

Notice how Moses' argument runs: "You (YHWH) have been unfair to me, you expect me to provide for Israel, but I am not their

mother (verse 12). You are their mother and you should feed them!"[9] When Moses is up against it and the issue is providence, the picture he turns to is a mother, because often mother is the one who is expected to provide.

So, given such a background, it is not surprising that one common word for God's love carries overtones of motherly love. The word is plural in form, *rahamim,* looking like the plural of *rehem*. *Rehem* is the word for a woman's womb, while *rahamim* means love. Because James Barr warned against "the etymological fallacy," we cannot simply say that because *rahamim* looks like *rehem* the two words share meaning.[10] Yet Phyllis Trible noticed two Bible stories which suggest a deeper than merely etymological connection between *rehem* and *rahamim*.[11]

In this case it is not merely that the two words look alike, but also in at least two places the writers of the Bible associate the two ideas. This is not surprising because the Bible writers loved puns and all sorts of word-play or echoes. In the Joseph story, the second time his brothers appear in Egypt, Benjamin's presence is significant. Benjamin, like Joseph, was the son of Rachel, while the other "brothers" are children of Leah or of one of the maidservants. In Genesis 43:29-30 Joseph looked up and sees "his brother Benjamin, his mother's son." It is only then that the text speaks of Joseph's "affection" *rahamim* for his brother.

The story of King Solomon and the two women who each claim the same baby is even clearer. The story concerns motherhood and babies, but neither woman is called "mother" at the start. Only after Solomon suggests dividing the child "fairly" and one woman is moved to "compassion" (*rahamim* 1 Kgs 3:26), does Solomon inform us: "she is his mother." The true mother's *rahamim* demonstrates that the child is the fruit of her *rehem*. Now, *rahamim* is used more often speaking of God than of mortals, so this motherly compassionate love is a divine as well as a maternal quality.

Preaching Comfort

The last chapters of Isaiah preach "comfort" to a discouraged and beaten people, who fear that God is powerless or does not love them (Is 40:1). They are overawed by the power of empire, and the prophet must

[9]Martin *Noth, Numbers: a Com*mentary (London: SCM, 1968), 86 ff.

[10]James *Barr, The Semantics of Biblical L*anguage, (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

[11]Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 31–34.

evoke a picture of God who cannot, and will not, let his people go, whose love is strong and relentless.[12]

In Isaiah 49,[13] this despair of the Judean exiles is expressed clearly in verse 14: "but Zion said, the LORD has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me." The response in verse 15 is clear and strong:
Can a woman forget the infant at her breast, or a loving mother the child of her womb? Though these can forget, I will not forget you!
A mother's love is proverbially tenacious, but Yahweh's love outlasts it. Not even the attachment between a woman and the child she has born and feeds, can really be compared with "his" attachment for "his" people. God's love is like a mother's love for the baby she gave birth to and is feeding, but even stronger.

In Isaiah 44 and 46 again the prophet needs to show a dispirited people how strong and faithful Yahweh's love is. God "formed" Israel and is a "redeemer." Redeemer (*go'el*) is a term from family life. The redeemer was an older relative with responsibility to protect the vulnerable members of the family. So Yahweh as "maker" is not an impersonal technician, indeed those formed are "sons" and "daughters" (Isaiah 43:6-7). These ideas are the background against which we read chapter 44:

> Thus says the LORD your maker,
> your shaper in the womb, who helps you.
> Do not fear, Jacob my servant.
> Jeshurun[14] I have chosen you." (Is 44:2)

This association of creation and womb is repeated later in the chapter:

> Thus says the LORD, your redeemer,
> your shaper in the womb.
> I am the LORD, maker of all,
> stretching out the heavens,
> by myself spreading the earth."

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[12]Mayer I. Gruber, "The Motherhood of God in Second Isaiah," *RB* 90 (1983): 351–359; reprinted in Mayer I. Gruber, *The Motherhood of God and Other Studies* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); and John J. Schmitt, "The Motherhood of God and Zion as Mother," *RB* 92 (1985): 557–569.

[13] Cf. Johanna Van Wijk-Bos, *Reimaging God: the Case for Scriptural Diversity* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995), 61–2.

[14]The rare name "Jeshurun" is just one link between this passage and Deut 32, cf. v.8 "I am the rock."

Unlike the human mother who ages, and must eventually be cared for by her children, God will carry "his" children even when they are old:

> Listen to me, house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, borne by me from your birth, (literally "from the belly") carried from the womb. Even to your old age I am he. When you turn gray, I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear, I will carry, and will save.

As creator, Yahweh is like a mother. As a mother, Yahweh is like Zion. In chapter 49, in verses 14 and 15 God's love is described as stronger than a mother's. While in verse 20 the returning exiles are "children born during your bereavement." Although Zion did not birth these children, they are hers, and so she says: "who has borne by these… who has reared them" (Is 49:21)? How would you answer Zion? There seems to be only one candidate. Marduk (the god of Babylon) is hardly a candidate, nor even Ishtar their goddess. If Zion herself is not the mother then Yahweh is the only candidate.

Zion's motherhood, and God's, recur in 66:7-14.[15] The birth is again unanticipated and miraculous. Zion has sons, despite being deserted, and with no expectant waiting or labor. Verse 9 offers the explanation: "shall I open the womb, and not deliver? says the LORD. Shall I, who delivers, shut the womb? says your God." While there were none of the usual signs of the forthcoming birth, the midwife is trustworthy! Verse 11 continues the picture:

> For thus says the LORD, I will extend prosperity to her like
> a river,
> and the nation's wealth like an overflowing stream.
> And you shall nurse and be carried on her arm,
> and cuddled of the knees.

Verse 11 echoes 49:23 while verse 12 echoes 49:22. But in verse 13 Zion is no longer the mother, Yahweh is. "As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you. You shall be comforted in Jerusalem." Again this echoes 49:15.[16]

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[15]On these verses compare Van Wijk-Bos, *Reimaging God*, 63–4.
[16]Whybray, *The Second Isaiah*, 286.

Two Parents Are Better Than One

As well as despair, Israel was also tempted like pagan religions to worship both a fatherly and a motherly god. If scholars who suggest that the Bible's God was thought of as a male were right, then this temptation would have been powerful. For, we know that two parents are better than one. Single parent families are neither ideal in terms of sociological research nor in theological understanding. If God were merely a male, then God would need a female counterpart as God "himself" recognized humans do in Genesis 2:18. But the Bible's God is not limited to being either male or female and the biblical word-pictures that describe God include both. We will now look at some passages that provide a balance of motherly and fatherly pictures of God.

In Psalm 27, the psalmist has been concerned about the possibility that God might forsake him (27:9) but recognizes that even: "if my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will gather me [to 'him']" (27:10). In Psalm 123 the imagery is gender-balanced but not parental: "See, as menservants' eyes are on their lord's hand, as a maid's our eyes are on her lady's hand, so our eyes are on the LORD our god, awaiting his favor."

In Job 38:28-29 the imagery, though impersonal, is parental:
Has the rain a father, or who begot the dew drops?

> From whose womb did the ice come forth,
> and who gave birth to heaven's hoarfrost?

Using the same verb (*yalad*) in the hiphil in verse 28 to mean "beget" and in the qal in verse 29 to mean "give birth" nicely both connects and distinguishes the motherly and the fatherly pictures here.[17]

The communal lament Psalm in Isaiah 63 begins (v.7) as such psalms often do, stating God's past grace:

> The LORD's gracious deeds, I will remember – the LORD's glories!
> For although the LORD has done for us, great good to the

[17]For this distinction between the qal and hiphil of *yalad* see a Hebrew lexicon or concordance.

house of Israel
that he has acted towards them according to his love
(*rahamim*),
according to his great faithfulness (*hesed*).[18]

God shows tender love for "his" children, for "surely they are my people, sons who will not deal falsely," so, he becomes their savior (Is 63:8). In verse 15 while "zeal and might" carry masculine overtones echoing warrior imagery, the next line is more feminine and motherly and so complementary. The expression "heart yearning" (*hamon me'eka*) is more literally "stirring of your insides" indeed *me'ah* can mean womb. The word translated love here is *rahamim*.

Where are your zeal and your might?
The yearning of your heart and your compassion? (Is 63:15)

The next verse presents God as father: "You are our father, for Abraham does not know us and Israel does not recognize us. You, LORD, are our father, 'Our redeemer from of old' is your name" (Is 63:16). As a father, God is both warrior proud and motherly tender (see verse 15).

Humans need a God who fulfills both fatherly and motherly roles. This need was clearly evident in the way in which gods very often had goddesses alongside them. It is evidenced too in the Catholic world by the way in which Mary (the Mother of Christ) is given a role which in everyday piety is divine. In Catholic dogma Mary's place is intended to be distinguished from God's, but in practice these subtle distinctions seem to be forgotten. We need a God who is both mother and father. If we make the mistake of picturing a god who is only a father, then somehow or other our need for a divine mother will burst out in ways which are dangerous. This has happened time and again in human history. The Israelites started to talk about Yahweh as if he were Ba'al. Ba'al was the male Canaanite god whose name meant "lord" a term appropriately applied to Yahweh. But *ba'al* also meant "husband." When they started to think of Yahweh too much as a *ba'al* "lord" and so also as husband, naturally they had to find a goddess to be his wife. This thought was wrong and the prophets told them it was wrong.

[18]Another "family" word, meaning the loving faithfulness expected between covenant partners and family members.

A similar thing happened in Christian history (see the next lecture) when Christians began to stop talking (in theology and worship) about God in motherly ways. When that happened, the Catholic Church strongly developed its devotion to Mary. Over time Mary became for them a kind of divine mother figure[19] because we need a God who is like both father and mother, but this need must not descend into idolatry.

Jeremiah chapters two and three tackle just this problem: "for numerous as your towns are your gods, Judah" (Jer 2:28c). God's people are once more turning to idols. And these graven images are shared by both leaders and ordinary people: "Like the thief's shame when found out, so the house of Israel shall be shamed, they, their Kings, their rulers, their priests, and their prophets" (Jer 2:26).
In verse 27 Jeremiah accuses them:

> Saying to a tree, 'you are my father', and to a stone, 'you gave me birth'. For towards my face, [they turn] their necks not their faces! But in the time of their trouble they say, 'Arise and save us!'

Whether such "homemade" gods are mothers or fathers they are equally useless:

> And where are your gods that you made for yourself?
> Let them arise, if they can save you, in your time of trouble
> (Jer 2: 28ab)!

God cannot be represented by physical images. God is a better "father" and a better "mother" than any log or stone idol!

Hosea chapter 11 provides an interesting case study. Here the Bible presents God in ways which are less gendered than many of its readers assumed. Mays titled it "the divine father,"[20] by contrast Lindbergh, more recently, rightly sees this passage presenting God as "parent."[21]

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[19]Indeed it happened slowly, beginning in practice in the Middle Ages, but the two key dogmas were only promulgated in 1854 (the immaculate conception) and 1950 (the assumption).

[20]James Luther Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1969), 150.

[21]James Limburg, *Hosea-Micah: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 38–43.

Consider this. Were the actions of this parent more likely, in ancient Israel, to be performed by a father or by a mother? In verse 4, while either parent might lift the child, teaching her toddler to walk, using reins to prevent falling, it is more likely to be the mother's job, and in most cultures feeding is more a mother's than a father's task. Also in verse 8, God's compassion is described using the word *rahamim*. This word we've seen carrying motherly overtones in the stories of Joseph and his brother Benjamin and of Solomon with the two women who each claimed to be the true mother of the same child.

In the "song of Moses" in Deuteronomy 32 mother language is explicit in verse 18:

> The rock who bore you, you neglected,
> and you forgot the God who gave you birth.

The verb in the second line (*hul*) describes a mother beyond all doubt. *Hul* means " to be in labor," it can even be used to contrast the roles of mother and father (Is 45:10; 51:2).[22] Fathering is never described by the verb *hul*. On the other hand the verb (*yalad*) in the first line could speak of either a mother's or a father's role in begetting children. It is interesting though, that the only other occurrence of this verb, where God is the subject of the verb, is in Numbers chapter 11 verse 12,[23] and there (as we have seen) it is clearly motherly.

Verse 18 of Moses' song pictures God as Israel's mother, deserted and ignored by her child, against all nature. Yet this song also pictures God as father:

> Is this how you repay the LORD, foolish people, without wisdom?
> Is not he your father, who got you, and made you, and established you? (Dt 32:6)

So in Moses' song, of God the faithful rock and "his" faithless people, images of both parents are used to highlight Israel's unnatural desertion of God. Moses knew God too well to be limited to either picture of God alone. Sometimes commentators find the mixing of

[22]The other use of the root, incapacitating fear, is not intended here, and is secondary, as comparative expressions often indicate (Is 13:8; Mi 4:10). On Is 45:9-13 compare Van Wijk-Bos, *Reimaging God*, 55–8.

[23]A. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979), 388.

motherly and fatherly pictures in this way strange or confusing.[24] Yet surely to associate the two parents is natural, for someone to be a mother requires that someone else be a father, and the reverse. Perhaps the fact that motherly talk of God is very rare in today's church drives these comments, rather than the actual content of the Bible itself.

In the fourth lecture in this series we will consider some of the ways in which the pastors and theologians of the Christian church, during its first 1,500 years, took up and made use of Biblical language and imagery describing God in motherly terms. There is one picture of God, found in the Old Testament, which I have not found anywhere else. It is at the heart of a short psalm, in this word picture, God is neither giving birth nor feeding, nor even protecting. Psalm 131 seeks to express and inculcate a simple and calm trust:

1. Lord, my heart is not proud,
   nor my eyes haughty;
   I'm not concerned with things
   too great and difficult for me.
2. Indeed I've calmed and quieted my soul,
   like a weaned child with its mother;
   my soul with me is like a weaned child.
3. Israel, hope in the Lord
   now and forever.

The core of the psalm in verse 2 is not easy to translate. My translation above is very close to both the NRSV and to the NIV.[25] However we render this verse, the picture it paints is clear. It speaks of a "weaned" child. The word is a passive form of the verb *gamal*. While talk of motherhood often leads to pictures of infants at the breast, this picture is different. Here a weaned child is cuddled to mother, but seeks nothing more than to be close to her. As a picture of the human relationship with God it suggests possibilities of a less demanding and therefore more mature interaction. The weaned child still depends on her parent, but the interaction is more complex than a baby demanding to suckle.

Interestingly the parent is a "mother," for children can cuddle either parent. If the Bible's God were merely male, then the parent here

[24]E.G. Samuel Rolles Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1986), 363.

[25]Compare e.g. Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms, with an Appendix: the Grammar of the Psalter 3, 101-150* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), 238ff.

could have been father. The parent **is** a mother, despite the non-gendered activity in which she is engaged, a further indication that the God of Scripture is beyond gender.

God as a Mother Hen

The New Testament is so focused on understanding who Jesus is, and what his coming means, that it has little space to explore more widely. Jesus' own teaching centers on the coming kingdom, and gradually introduces talk of his death and its meaning. But both Matthew and Luke record one occasion when Jesus pictured himself, or possibly God the Father, as being like a mother hen:

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to it! How often I desired to gather your children as a bird gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you [desolate]. And [For] I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.' (Matt. 23:37-39 and Lk. 13:34-35)

The word here that is translated as "bird" might suggest either a cockerel or a hen. Except that in this case the word is constructed as feminine. It must therefore be understood as a hen, because the possessives associated with it in both gospels are feminine. What Jesus is saying here reminds us strongly of passages talking about Yahweh's relationship with Zion. Especially in Isaiah, this relationship is often spoken of in motherly ways. Elsewhere, Jesus had talked of the father who sends prophets and messengers. But here either Jesus or his Father is pictured as a mother-hen who wants to protect her chicks. We keep chickens at home, and when one has hatched a brood she can be fierce. When she perceives danger, as well as threatening the source with her sharp beak, she spreads her wings tightly to cover and hide her chicks.

This picture that Jesus uses was common in the Old Testament. The Psalms especially refer to God's protection using phrases like "shelter in the shadow of your wings" (Ps 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7 and 91:4). Jesus expresses the picture more fully. He describes gathering the young and makes it explicit that the wings belong to a mother bird with a "brood." Thus Jesus makes clear the implicitly motherly picture he takes from the Old Testament.

New Birth

One of the central images of the New Testament implies that God is mother, but we seldom notice this. At the beginning of John's gospel, time and again through the New Testament and even more in more recent Christian speech, the imagery of being "born again" is used.

This idea was introduced in John 1:12 where those who believe "are given the power to become children of God." One becomes a child either by birth, or by adoption. Both processes are used as pictures for becoming a child of God in the New Testament. But birthing is the dominant picture at the beginning of John's gospel. John 1:13 speaks of children who "were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God." In Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, the motherly nature of God's parenting becomes the focus.

Jesus told the Pharisee: "Truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." The verb here *gennaio,* repeated eight times in just five verses, carries the theme. Nicodemus replies: "Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus affirms that entering God's kingdom is being born of the Spirit (John 3:6, 8). In verses 5 and 6 the preposition *ek* is used with this verb this usually indicates giving birth, rather than a father begetting. This new birth language is also prominent in 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18 and the picture is also used in James and Peter. In James 1:18 the verb used, *apokeueo,* with God as its subject, means to give birth. (In verse 15 it is used again to distinguishing conception from birthing.)

How can Christians, who love the language of the "new birth," have difficulty with picturing God as a mother? Perhaps it is because talk of being born again has become such a cliché that we no longer understand it as picture-language. If we did we might ask ourselves who it is that gives birth?

Conclusion

The authors of the Bible were not afraid to use motherly language and pictures to describe God. Indeed when they needed a picture of God's unswerving, faithful love, this picture was powerful. Motherly language and pictures are less frequent than fatherly ones, but they are significant and important. The Bible is, however, restrained with such gendered and engendering pictures of God, and perhaps motherly and fatherly language and pictures occur together as one form of protection against the danger of idolatry inherent in the use of either alone.

[*AJPS* 17:2 (2014), pp. 139-150]

JESUS AND THE FATHER

By Tim Bulkeley

In my previous two lectures, I stressed that the God of the Bible is not "a god"—that is, God is not one being among many (or even few) of a kind but is totally and completely unique. This is expressed in the Hebrew word *'echad*, meaning the one, the only. I then went through some of the Scripture passages that make use of motherly language or pictures to talk about God, suggesting this provides us with a resource to broaden the ways in which we think and talk about God.

Before we begin, it is important to state that I am not suggesting we should stop calling God "father." For Jesus called God "father," so naturally we should continue to do so. What I am suggesting, however, is that our talk about God would be fuller if we explored and used other ways of speaking about God to help fill out the picture so that our language and thought are closer to the truth.

Jesus named God as "Father"

Clearly, Jesus did use the name Father to speak about God. This seems indisputable. However, as always, when we read the Bible or are talking about things from the distant past, it is important that we put them in their context. A significant part of the context for thinking about the writers of the New Testament (NT) using "father" language so dominantly is to remember that the most important thing they were doing was seeking to make sense of *their* experience of Jesus.

Jesus came into the world as something that had never before been known. The NT writers had to try to understand what that meant. Thus, we see in the NT a number of ways in which they tried to grapple with the fact of Jesus. Some of those ways we have retained; others, like thinking of Jesus as the Wisdom of God, we have almost forgotten. Indeed, in the NT itself, this reference becomes less used in the later writings. The central thing the NT writers were doing was to try to articulate their experience of Jesus.

As part of that, one of their tasks was to make sense of their emerging understanding that Jesus was God. Getting a real hold on this idea was difficult for the earliest Christians because they were Jewish. For a people steeped in the Old Testament (OT), God was the one and only. It would have been easy for early Christians to grasp the fact that Jesus was God *if* they had been polytheists, for then they could just have added Jesus as one more god. However, for Jewish people, this was a problem since God is one, not many. They somehow had to understand that, if Jesus was God, God was also God, yet Jesus prayed to God. As part of that process, a core idea they used time and again was to talk about the relationship between Jesus and God as being like the relationship between a father and a son. This provided a way of talking about God-not-Jesus that made sense and, although difficult, worked well on several levels.[1] Over the centuries, we have confirmed that it works well indeed; and we have continued to use this language, taking our cue from the NT writers.

However, in modern talk about God as "father," a great deal has been made of the fact that Jesus called God *'abba*, which is claimed to be an equivalent of the English word 'daddy.' Some scholars have concluded from this argument that talk about God as "father" emerges because of Jesus' unique relationship with God. They claim this talk was something new that Jesus gave to the world; initially, it was his own usage, but later Christians borrowed this language.[2] I want to examine this idea critically because I do not think it is quite right.

It is correct that Jesus did call God *'abba*. The early Christians copied him; and father-language became one of their common ways to talk about God, not least because this made it easier to think of Jesus also as God. However, does the fact that Jesus called God *'abba* mean Jesus used this baby-talk or familiar form because his relationship with the Father was unique? Clearly not, for Paul speaks twice of *'abba* as a way all believers should address God (Rom 8:15 & Gal 4:6), while

[1]Of course, no picture-language works in every way.

[2]Joachim Jeremias is often cited, in particular his "The Prayers of Jesus," but an earlier German scholar Gerhard Kittel also supported the idea in his "πατήρ;" *Theological Dictionary of the New Testamen*t (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964). Jeremias is still cited in support of this claim, although he later retracted it saying, "One often reads (and I myself believed it at one time) that when Jesus spoke to his heavenly Father he took up the chatter of a small child. To assume this would be a piece of inadmissible naivety;" Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesu*s (Studies in Biblical Theology 2/6; London: SCM, 1977), 62; the original German edition of his paper was Joachim Jeremias, *Abba. Studien zur neutestamentlichen Theologie und Zeitgeschichte*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966).

Jesus only used the term once in the gospel accounts of his teaching and praying (Mark 14:36). For Paul, the use of *'abba* was not an expression of Jesus' unique closeness to God nor was the usage special to Jesus. Already by the time of Paul, before the gospels were written, *'abba* was not a usage special to Jesus, but for all Christians.

More than this, some scholars have argued that such father-language was rare or unknown in the Judaism of Jesus' day. It is certainly rare for such language to be used of an individual's relationship with God in the OT. So, was the use of "my father" or "our father" to speak of God something Jesus introduced? There is evidence for such individual usage well before the time of Jesus. Even already in the Apocrypha in Sirach 23:1, 4, an individual calls God father (and cf. Wisdom 14:3), and the "Joseph Prayer" in 4Q372 1:16f. addresses God as "my Father"). Turning to Rabbinic Judaism, Alon Goshen-Gottstein, in his study of God the Father, noted around a hundred rabbinic uses of the phrase "Father in Heaven" (that we know from Matthew's gospel). He concluded, "If Jesus had a realization of God to share with his Jewish audience, this was an experiential deepening of their own traditional understanding and obviously did not stand in conflict with it."[3]

Concerning this question, it is also interesting to look at where 'father' is used to speak of God in the gospels when they are quoting Jesus' speech; that is, not everywhere God is called "father" in the gospels, but only where Jesus uses this term. It turns out that it is rare in the gospels for Jesus to call God 'father,' except in John. Here are the figures:[4]

> In Mark[5]—5; in material common to Matthew and Luke—9; in material special to Luke—5; in material special to Matthew—18; and in John—117.

Noting that scholarship usually dates Mark as the earliest gospel and John as most theological and the latest, these figures suggest that the early church remembered Jesus as using "father" more often than he perhaps actually did.

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[3]Alon Goshen-Gottstein, "God the Father in Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity: Transformed Background or Common Ground?," *Journal of Ecumenical Studi*es 38, no. 4 (2001): 503.

[4]Hofius, O., "Father," ed. Brown, Colin, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theolo*gy (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Books, 1986), 619–20.

[5]Mark 8:38; 11:25; 13:32; 14:36 (the last using both *pater* and *'abba* as synonyms).

So the rabbis of Jesus' day were not shocked by calling God "father"; and Jesus was remembered as using this term, which became so common in the early church, more than he, again, perhaps actually did. Talk of God as 'father' was not something strange and new that Jesus taught; it was more likely something he learned from his teachers.

Because we copy Jesus' usage and call God "father," it is important to notice these facts. What we should not do is exaggerate the extent to which calling God "father" was something Jesus taught that was unique or new to him. Rather, it seems it was the early church who found this father-son language helpful for understanding Jesus' relationship with God and who made it a dominant way of talking.

Fathers in the ancient world and Jesus' talk of God

Because we do want to continue to call God "father" as Jesus did, we need to ask: What did this language of God as father mean to Jesus? What was Jesus thinking when he used that picture-language? Picture-language needs more conscientious examination than the more careful language we sometimes use.[6] So to what passage would you turn if you wanted to know what Jesus meant when he talked of God as 'father?' One of the first suggestions would likely be—the 'prodigal son' (Luke 15:11-32).

It is interesting that we use the Western name for this story, for that name is misleading. Jesus' parable is not about a wasteful (prodigal) son but about a father with two sons or, perhaps better, about a lost son. Following two shorter parables about lost sheep and lost coins, in this story, first one son is lost and then at the end, when he is returned to the father, it's the other son who's revealed as "lost."

Before we look at how Jesus pictured God as father (and especially before looking at this particular story), we need to ask how fatherhood was understood in Jesus' culture. Although scholars may debate the details of Pilch's brief summary from the *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*, its outlines would be widely accepted. He wrote, "Clearly, the father is viewed as severe, stern and authoritarian; the mother is viewed as loving and compassionate. Children respect and fear the father but love the mother affectionately even after they are married."[7]

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[6]We use picture-language much of the time and careful propositional language more rarely.

[7]Pilch, John J., "Father," ed. John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina, *Handbook of Biblical Social Values* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 147.

We can see the stern punishing aspect (especially in the father's relationship with his son) clearly in Proverbs 13:24, 22:15, and 23:13-14. The evidence suggests that, in Israel and the Eastern Mediterranean, generally sons were expected to respect and even fear their fathers. At the same time, they were to have a warmer and more affectionate relationship with their mothers—even after marrying and starting their own homes, when they themselves had such a dignified, distant, and authoritative father. This picture of someone distant, authoritative and dignified seems to be what we should expect to have been in the minds of Jesus' hearers. But is it this cultural picture that Jesus teaches?

In his parable, there is a father with two sons. One is incredibly rude and demands his share of the inheritance even while his father is alive. He then goes off and wastes it. With the money gone, he is reduced to feeding pigs and envies what they get to eat. Recognizing that even his father's servants live better, he returns home with the intention of asking for a job. But his father, seeing him in the distance, runs to him and hugs and kisses him. He then orders fine clothes and a party to welcome the lost son home.[8]

Notice how the father in Jesus' story behaves. Just about everything he does breaks the cultural stereotypes:

- He goes to meet the son. (That's wrong—a son should come to meet the father. who is senior.)
- He runs to the son. (That's wrong—a father is to be dignified, honored, and respected; he is to walk with dignity, like a professor in a graduation ceremony.)
- He hugs the son. (That's wrong—this son insulted his father gravely by asking for his share of the inheritance then going off, so the father should wait for the son to first beg for forgiveness.

Just about everything this father does is wrong by the cultural standards of the Eastern Mediterranean at that time.

This story "works" because the father's behavior is a surprise—as do many other of Jesus' stories, which surprise or even shock the

[8]In the story as Jesus tells it, the other son then reveals himself as "lost," and it seems clear from the context (Luke 15:1) that this was the point of the story. However, our interest is in how Jesus pictures God as father; and for this, we can perhaps stop at this point.

hearer.[9] Would it had worked as well (in almost any culture) if Jesus had told it of a mother? Would a mother welcoming home a lost, rebellious, son have had as much of an impact in helping people discover God's forgiveness and love in a new way? If Jesus had told the story of a mother with two sons, could this have surprised the Pharisees and so caused them to think about, and perhaps move from, their judgment of Jesus for welcoming sinners (Luke 15:1)? In most cultures, mothers are expected to be more loving and forgiving than fathers.[10]

I think that this story is so remembered because Jesus tells it of a father and not of a mother. Indeed, instead of becoming a favorite parable, the story of a mother with two sons might likely have been forgotten. Looking closer at the question of how Jesus thought of God using father pictures then gets more interesting, because one finds that Jesus makes a habit of describing Father-God as breaking cultural norms.

In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Father-God feeds and clothes (Matt 6:26-32, Luke 11:1-2, 13, Luke 12:30, John 6:32 cf. Luke 24:49, John 6:27); yet by the cultural expectations of the time, these were the mother's roles. Also, Father-God gives gifts to bad as well as good children (Matt 5:45). Culturally, this might be allowable (or at least understandable) for a mother); but for a father, it would be disapproved because he was failing his responsibility to discipline. Discipline was a central part of the father's job in raising children. (We get some feel for this in the way a child's submission and respect are criteria for respecting the father (I Tim 3:4, 12, Titus 1:6). There is even an echo in modern Western culture of this expectation that fathers discipline in the phrase, "Wait till your father gets home!" Father-God, however, consistently forgives rather than punishes in Matt 6:14-15, Matt 18:35, Mark 11:25, and in Luke 6:36 where the father does judge (5:45; 8:16 but cf. 5:22). So it is not true that Father-God does not judge or that he

[9]As an aside, I noticed that as well as "interesting" (a word with at least two possible senses in this context), another word some of the audience had begun to use about the topic of the lectureship was "shocking." If that leads one to a closer relationship with God, as the shock of Jesus' stories did for his hearers, then I am happy for my readers to be shocked by this topic! However, I pray that I have not given any other cause for shock.

[10]In Chinese culture, the story told of a mother might "work" if the context was upper-class, since upper-class women are supposed to be demanding of their sons' good behavior. In many other cultures, however, the story could only be told of a mother if the father were elsewhere; for if the father were around, the mother could not run to greet the son first.

fails to act like a father. But Jesus' Father-God acts like a mother as well.

Father-God also deals with infants and little children (Matt 11:25, Matt 18:14, Luke 10:21). The archetypical picture of a father and son is usually of a boy walking beside dad perhaps holding his dad's hand, or of the two collaborating as father teaches son; whereas the archetypical picture of a mother and son is usually the mother with a baby or toddler. Think, for example, of the images of Jesus with his mother in Catholic culture; for every Mary holding a crucified Christ, there are likely more of the Santo Niño, often on her knee.

Another example is the puzzling phrase, "Your father who is/sees in secret…" (Matt 6:4, 6, 18, cf. 6:1). Clearly, this might be a reference to God who sees everything, yet that does not seem to be what Jesus means here. In 6:4, it might be this sense; but in 6:6, we are to go into a closed room to meet our "father who sees in secret." In Eastern Mediterranean culture, the father's role was public and the mother's private. The woman's place was (literally) in the home, while the public face of the household was the man, as is still the case in Islamic culture.

In summary, although Jesus' picture of Father-God includes the fatherly attributes that the surrounding culture expects, it also includes key elements that would more naturally have been said of a mother.

The Issue of God's Gender

Many people have argued from the fact that, since Jesus was male, in some sense God is more male than female, although most are careful to not say that God is male. For to say that would not be orthodox Christian theology. This thinking often appears in the discussions of women preachers or ministers. The great Christian apologist C.S. Lewis argued that women should not be Anglicans clergy, claiming that there is a sense in which God is more male than female, thus a woman is not as appropriate as a representative of God.[11]

One of the most respected Christian thinkers and apologists of the 20th century, Lewis is almost always quite clear in what he says and means. In this case, that "clarity of thought," it seems to me, reveals where Lewis is wrong; for since about 300 AD (at the latest), Christian theology has not limited God to one gender or the other. God is beyond such categories—God is spirit.

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[11]C.S. Lewis, *Undeceptions: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (ed. Walter Hooper; London: Bles, 1971), 193.

Elizabeth Achtemeier, another Christian thinker whom I also greatly respect, made similar arguments more recently in a series of publications.[12] As a biblical scholar, I think she should have known better. It seems clear from Scripture, as well as later Christian theology, that once we make God part of some "group" and not of others or sharing a category with some class of beings but not another class of beings, we have reduced God to a "god." Such a reduction of the Godhead to merely a member of some class of beings rather than clearly the One and only is simply idolatry. It reduces God to part of the world.

I respect both these thinkers enormously and recommend their works to you, but on this issue they are dangerously wrong—for God has no gender!

In thinking about this issue of whether Jesus' maleness makes the Godhead in some sense male, one can consider the relationship of Jesus, as the second person of the Trinity, to the entire Trinity. The argument is advanced as follows: Since Jesus was male then the entire Trinity must be, in some sense, at least more male than female, for the three persons are of the same *ousia*, distinguished by their relationship not by their natures. This argument seems strange, since we do not take any other of Jesus' physical characteristics and apply them to God. God does not have particular hair color, eye color, height, etc., for God is spirit. In technical language, this argument confounds *oikonomia* (the working of God) with *theologia* (the being of God), or the *logos ensarkos* (the Word Incarnate) with the *logos endiathetos* (the Word of God in the being of God from all eternity).

In this connection, although many people would love to know what Jesus looked like, we have no eyewitness pictures or descriptions to confirm our images. When the BBC wanted to show how Jesus might have looked, it required a lot of money, clever archaeologists, and technology to invent a reconstruction. If Jesus' physical characteristics belonged to his divine nature, would the disciples not have described

[12]Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Female Language for God: Should the Church Adopt It?," *Transformation* 4,2 (1987): 24-30; Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Why God Is Not Mother," *Christianity Today* 37,9 (1993): 17-23; Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Exchanging God for 'No Gods': A Discussion of Female Language for God," in *Speaking the Christian God: the Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism* (ed. Alvin F. Kimel; Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1992), 1-16; Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Female Language for God: Should the Church Adopt It?," in *The Hermeneutical Quest: Essays in Honor of James Luther Mays on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (ed. James Mays; Allison Park, PA.: Pickwick, 1986), 97-114; see also other authors collected in Alvin F. Kimel, *Speaking the Christian God: the Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992).

him? Jesus' claim that "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30) and the statement in Genesis that we are created "in the image of God" (Gen 1:27) do not mean that either our or Jesus' physical appearance or characteristics are properties of the Godhead. Jesus and the Father are of one "essence," not of one appearance.

Note that this argument is not concerned with aspects of Jesus' character or actions but merely with his physical characteristics. Because we do not ever transfer any other of these characteristics of the incarnate Jesus to the Godhead, except his sex, it seems to me the people who make this claim are the ones who need to establish their case. A brown-eyed "god" is not God. Thus, the early theologians stated it clearly: "God has no gender."[13]

The understanding that God, the One and only, is not a member of any class of beings is not something new; it was known and taught by the earliest Christian theologians and pastors. Nor did this idea have to wait for the working out of complex Christian doctrines; it was already implied in Scripture—"God is spirit," Jesus taught (John 4:24); and "In Christ there is neither male nor female," Paul affirmed (Gal 3:28).

Language

The claim that God is not a member of any class or group of beings, neither human nor gods, means that all our word-pictures of God are wrong as well as right. They may be true in some ways and untrue in others. We are all tempted to want to think that our pictures of God are perfect, but this can never be. No human language about God can ever be a perfect description of God. All we can do is to try getting closer and closer to the indescribable greatness of God, which is more than we can begin to imagine. So, all of our pictures of God are both right and wrong, true in some ways and false in others.

One of the ways in which Scripture itself seeks to correct the wrong in its pictures of God is to put two strikingly different pictures together—for two together say more than one on its own. I gave an example of this, which has nothing to do with mothers and fathers in an earlier lecture. In Isaiah 40:10-11, we have the picture of God as victorious conquering hero-king bringing home the spoils of war and the picture of God as a tender shepherd cuddling a little lamb. By

[13]Gregory of Nyssa, *Homily VII In Cantica Canticorum* (PG 44: 916B)—"God is not either male or female;" in Greek, the quotation reads: *epeide gar oute arren, oute thelu to theion esti*;. Jerome, *In Esaiam* (CCSL 73: 459, 1.82-83)—"There is no sexuality in the Godhead;" in Latin, the quotation reads: *In divinitate enim nullus est sexus.*

bringing these two different images together, the prophet leads us closer to a fuller richness of God than either picture alone could do. God is indeed a powerful conquering king; but God is, at the same time, tender and gentle, like someone cuddling a lamb.

It is similar with the picture of "father." Father is a wonderful picture of God. For many of us, it is a favorite way of describing God's love, care, and even discipline; yet it is limited. Our cultural expectations tend to limit it is some ways, while our actual experience of human fathers may limit it in others. Although when we are small, we may think our fathers are perfect; but in fact, they are broken human beings as we are.

When I was nineteen years old, I learned firmly of my father's brokenness and weakness. On a holiday, he, my younger brother, and I were driving through France, while my mother was home in England with our youngest brother. During that trip, dad had a severe nervous breakdown, the result of a flashback from WWII as an ambulance driver. (He was a pacifist who refused to fight, so had to pick up the broken pieces and shattered human beings during the fighting.) During his breakdown, he became incapable of caring for us; rather we had to care for him. He said strange and bizarre things, hearing voices "by radio" in his head. That aspect of my father is simply not true of God, who is absolutely dependable.

In many ways, my father was a wonderful picture of God. I do not know of a man who was more loving, caring, and gentle than he, but dad was not the best picture of God's discipline. Of my parents, he was the gentler and the more apt to let wrongdoing pass with just a “Don't do it again.” It was my mother who taught us discipline. For other people, it would be different; and in cultural stereotypes, it is different. But for all of us, if we have two "good parents," they will each be good parents in different ways. Of course, if we have one good and one bad parent, the problem this poses for picturing God becomes much more difficult.

Just as for human babies it is better to have both a mum and a dad, it is better also for our picturing of God if we can view him as both like a dad and a mum. I think this is one of the things Jesus was doing in his talk of God as "father." He talks about a father who is a motherly father.

The Father and the Son

A question often raised about this material is whether what I am saying means that we could as well talk about the relationship of the first and second persons of the Trinity as Mother and Daughter or as Father and Daughter or as Mother and Son—i.e., is there something special about the Father-Son language that is needed for orthodox theology? This is a question about which I am still unclear. On the one hand, Father and Son are, in fact, the names revealed to us in Scripture, so they are the ones I am happy to use. While I do not know if these other pictures would be possible, what I do know is that no human father-son relationship matches that between Father-God and Jesus. They are, at best, pale echoes of that reality. The relationship between Father and Son is not the same as that between a father and a son—it is way beyond. The Father-Son picture is only a picture, not in some magical way "language." Although it sounds like picture-language, it somehow escapes the limitations of picture-language. It is not the careful, cautious language of philosophy but rather the picture-language of poetry, song, and worship. Although using Father and Son as names sounds different from mere picture language, it does not escape the limitations that come with the usage of such language. It is not the careful language of philosophy but rather the picture language of poetry, song and worship

The language of the Bible is holy; it should not be touched. Therefore, I think the discussions among missiologists and Bible translators about amending the Father-Son language of the Bible to avoid offending Muslim readers was resolved the right way. It was not an issue like that raised by gender-neutral Bible translations that, for example, avoid using "brothers" to represent the Greek *adelphoi* in places where the Bible writers clearly did not intend to exclude women. That debate is about the intent of the Bible writers and the meaning of words being subject to change over time in all languages.

Yet all language is "dangerous." Even careful philosophical or systematic theological language, but specifically everyday language, is dangerous. Just think how often what we say is misunderstood. Picture language expresses feelings as well as ideas and so is extra dangerous. As people who use language to talk about God, we have a responsibility to try to minimize the dangers. (Notice how often sects develop by taking language from Scripture by careless use that does not minimize the dangers of picture language, with the result that they are led way off track.)

Conclusion

Jesus showed us one way to minimize the danger of calling God "father"—by describing a father who shares some motherly characteristics. There are also other ways. For example, if we are careful to broaden our experience of God, we will be more likely to use greater variety in our images and our words. If we are not to think that God is merely a father, we need to, in some ways, experience God as mother. As pastors, teachers, and people who preach or lead worship, we have a responsibility to help others broaden their experience of God too. All of us have limited experience of God, none even coming close to the reality; so we should always try to give people a richer, fuller understanding of God.

[*AJPS* 17:2 (2014), pp. 151-161]

SPEAKING THE UNSPEAKABLE: NEARLY 1,500 YEARS OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND WORSHIP

By Tim Bulkeley

In the first of these five lectures, we stressed one of the basic but too often forgotten or ignored postulates of Christian theology—that God is alone and only, not a member with others of any class or group of beings. In Latin, God is *sui generis* or of his own kind. In terms of gender and sexuality, if God were either really "he" or "she" or "he and she," such a god would merely be part of this larger group of sexual or gendered beings. Although people may choose to imagine God as "he," God is beyond he-ness and she-ness, just as God is beyond every other category we can imagine.

We also talked about how this "being beyond" means that to speak of God using everyday language, we need to use pictures, otherwise we cannot approach speaking positively about God. The other way is the negative route—i.e., to talk about what God is not. God is not limited or God is not part of some group of beings. However, circling around God by saying what God is not leaves a sort of hole in the middle, which may satisfy philosophers and some systematic theologians but is not appropriate language for worship or preaching. For worship and preaching, we must use picture language. However, pictures are both powerful and dangerous.

In the second lecture, we explored some of the ways in which the Bible uses motherly language and pictures to describe God. Then in the third lecture, we moved on to consider how Jesus talked about God the Father and how that relates to the possibility of talking about God as motherly. It is quite striking that, in the New Testament, "Father" is used as a name for God with increasing frequency by the early Christians, so that it becomes one of their (and therefore our) favorite names for God. We also addressed the question of whether the fact that Jesus was male means that God is, in any sense, male.

If you find these ideas interesting or challenging, I want to reassure you that this kind of language was used by many of the most highly respected pastors and theologians of the Christian church for almost our first millennium and a half. For most of us, our institutional memory or church memory only goes back a few hundred years (thinking of the oldest worship songs and devotional books still in use.)

In this fourth lecture, we will examine some of the motherly language and pictures used by Christian thinkers, pastors, and theologians from the writing of the New Testament up until about 1400 AD. I will argue that Christian theologians and teachers have been happy to use motherly language and pictures to speak about God for the majority of church history. To decide the exact proportion of that period would require us to be sure of the time such usage ceased. In preparing my thesis, I found only a few uses between the early 1400s and the 20th century, so 1400 AD is the approximate date I am using. During those 1,400 years, talk of God as motherly was never common (except perhaps in Syrian baptismal services), but it was persistently present.

Early Syriac Christianity

Syriac is a Semitic language, a dialect of Aramaic, and close to the language that Jesus and the disciples spoke. Before the church spoke Greek and then Latin, the heart of Christianity was in Syriac-speaking areas. This usage has continued up to today in some parts of the world; but in the early centuries, there were three major languages for Christian writings—Syriac, Greek, and Latin.

In Syriac, the word "spirit" *ruah* is feminine. (Like Hebrew, Syriac has only two genders.) So, since "spirit" is a feminine word, when Syriac speakers are talking about the Holy Spirit, they have to talk about "her" as "she." I don't; I use English, so I talk about the Holy Spirit as "he" because "spirit" isn't feminine in English. But because it was in Syriac, Syriac speakers spoke of the Holy Spirit as "her." Thus, it was easier for them to picture the Spirit of God as motherly, for they were already calling "her" "she." (It is much easier to think of God as a mother if you are calling "her" "she." It is naturally more difficult if you are calling "him" "he.")

The early Syriac Christians did this frequently when they were talking about baptism, which should not surprise us since it marks and symbolizes our new birth. To be reborn implies the idea of a new mother. For the picture of being "born again" implies a mother to give

this birth. So when Syrian Orthodox and Maronite churches today take the words of their baptismal services from the very ancient liturgies, they sometimes speak of the "womb of the Spirit." This refers to the waters of baptism, for in baptism the Holy Spirit descends, fills us, and we are 'born again,' united in the death of Christ in the water. So the service reads like this:

> Blessed are you, Lord God, through whose great and indescribable gift this water has been sanctified by the coming of your Holy Spirit so that it has become the womb of the Spirit that gives birth to the new man out of the old.[1]

Or in a service attributed to Timothy:

> Yea, we beseech you, Father of mercies and God of all comfort, send your living Spirit and sanctify this water, and may it become the womb of the Spirit that gives rebirth anew to mankind who are baptised in it.[2]

In the opening of the creation story in Genesis 1, there are several translation problems. In 1:2, a significant issue concerns the rendering of the verb *rahap*, which could mean, "sweep," "move," "beat," "brood," or "hover." We are not quite sure how to translate it. There is only one (or possibly two) other uses of this verb in Scripture—Deuteronomy 32:11 and Jeremiah 23:9. But these and the cognate languages use the verb in the context of birds, and most translations reflect this fact. In Syriac, the cognate word *rahep* is used in Gen 1:2 and means "brood,"[3] which is the word one would use for a hen hatching her eggs. So as these early Syriac Christians read the creation story, they could hardly help but picture the Spirit of God as being like a mother hen.

How do we imagine being "born again?" It is a term commonly used in Evangelical circles and likely also among Pentecostals. (Certainly I heard the term used often during my visit to Asia Pacific Theological Seminary to describe the results of evangelistic activity.) But how is it pictured? Or has it become merely a dead metaphor? A dead metaphor is where picture language is used without any awareness

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[1]Sebastian P. Brock, *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*. Gorgias Press, 2008, 86.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Word, 1987), 17.

of the picture. For instance, in everyday English, the phrase "You pig!" is used to describe someone who is greedy. That likely does not evoke an image of those delightful animals, which are kept to make into bacon, ham, and sausage; the word "pig" has simply added another meaning, except when someone revives the metaphor. For many modern Christians, the idea of being "born again" has become a dead metaphor, but perhaps it was still lively for Syriac Christians and perhaps could/should be revived today.

God Beyond Gender

Moving forward a century or so, it was already commonplace among Christian theologians (also in the Greek and Latin worlds) to claim that God was the One and Only, thus *sui generis* or beyond gender. In my previous lecture, two prominent examples were cited—Jerome and Eusebius, one Latin and the other Greek. Jerome was one of the great Bible translators of all time, the first to render the whole Scripture from Hebrew and Greek into Latin, and one of the most respected scholars of the early church. He noticed that in Latin *spiritus* was masculine while in Greek *pneuma* was neuter and in Syriac *ruah* was feminine. This was for him a reminder that gender categories do not apply to the transcendent God.[4] For Jerome, this was already not something new but well-known, albeit sometimes forgotten. By contrast, Gregory of Nazianzus assumed that such a basic understanding (i.e., that the Godhead is not gendered) is a firm foundation for his arguments against various other heresies.[5] Other influential Greek and Latin "fathers" also stressed this fact, sometimes citing Galatians 3:28 in support.[6]

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[4]Jerome, *In Esaiam* (CCSL 73: 459, 1.82-83): "There is no sexuality in the Godhead;" in Latin, the quotation reads: *In divinitate enim nullus est sexus*.

[5]Gregory of Nazianzus, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2, 7, edited by Philip Schaff, "The Fifth Theological Oration: On the Holy Spirit," VII, 643, makes fun of those who assume that human characteristics can be ascribed to God when he writes: "Or maybe you would consider our God to be a male, according to the same arguments, because he is called God and Father, and that Deity is feminine, from the gender of the word, and Spirit neuter, because It has nothing to do with generation; But if you would be silly enough to say, with the old myths and fables, that God begat the Son by a marriage with His own Will, we should be introduced to the Hermaphrodite god of Marcion and Valentinus who imagined these newfangled Eons."

[6]For recent discussion of this, see Thomas Hopko, *Women and the Priesthood* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999), especially the section "Patristic Views of Gender," 173ff.; and Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 89-96.

God the Father as Mother

In addition to motherly language and imagery for the Spirit (the third person of the Trinity), while it may seem paradoxical, there was also a tradition of ascribing motherly language and characteristics to God the Father (the first person of the Trinity). Early on, one of the great teachers of the first few centuries of Christianity, Clement of Alexandria (an enthusiast who often used somewhat flowery language) wrote:

> Behold the mysteries of love, and then you will have a vision of the bosom of the Father, whom the only-begotten God alone declared. God's very self is love, and for love's sake he became visible to us. And while the unspeakable part of Him is Father, the part that has sympathy with us is Mother. By his loving the father became of woman's nature, a great proof of which is He whom He begat from himself; and the fruit that is born of love is love.[7]

This translation is an old one and the thought patterns are Clement's, so we will exegete the passage. Clement is talking about the mysteries of God's love. He desires that his audience grasp this so that, when he says. . . . "the bosom of the Father," they feel they are being hugged by God. It is the only-begotten Son, Jesus, who reveals this to us. We don't see God the Father; however, some of us do see Jesus and can see the actions and hear the words of Jesus in the gospels. He is declaring the Father to us. Clement also says. . . . "God's very self is love," taking a clue from the Johannine writings, especially 1 John 1: 8, 16, which contain the words "God is love." Love is part of the nature of God, and part of what makes God God is the fact that God loves. God became visible in Jesus Christ because "he" loves us, and it is difficult to love someone you cannot see.

Having introduced this idea that God is invisible but also is love, Clement further says. . . . "the unspeakable part of him is Father;" that is, the part[8] of God to whom we do not have direct access is the Father.

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[7]Text from Otto Stahlin, *Clemens Alexandrinus*. (ed. Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1905), 183 l. 31-184 l. 4; translation from *Clement, Clement of Alexandria* (ed. G.W. Butterworth; London / New York: W. Heinemann / G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1919), 347.

[8]Using everyday language and not the more careful formulation systematic theology would require.

The Father is the hidden part of God. This is interesting because in Graeco-Roman culture, it was mothers not fathers who were private and hidden. I think Clement recognizes this issue in what he next says. . . . " The part of him that has sympathy with us is Mother." Then, it is as if he says to himself, "I had better explain this to them, because we do not use mother language much in church and they may get shocked." So he goes on to say. . . . "By his loving, the father became of woman's nature, a great proof of which is He whom He begat from himself." Thus for Clement, the great proof that God is both father and mother is Jesus, since Jesus is begotten of God, and Clement has difficulty speaking about a birth without both a father and a mother. So Clement is talking about the Father as also being motherly.

In many of his writings, like the Bible writers, Clement mixes different pictures in order to get closer to the truth. He lives in a world of distant, respected fathers and intimate, loving mothers. "Father" helps us understand the distance and transcendence of God, while "mother" helps us understand that God as love. In my thesis and my little book, I give many more examples of patristic writers who speak of the Father as motherly, including St Augustine.[9]

The Motherly "Son"

We need now to move on because I want to make sure you understand that Christianity has had the habit of picturing each of the persons of the Trinity as being like a mother. For difficult as it may seem, the early church fathers also talked about the Son as mother. This thought is present in a number of the earlier writers including Clement,[10] Chrysostom,[11] and later Augustine.[12] However, such talk reaches its peak with Anselm, the Archbishop of Canterbury and one of the best theologians of the early middle ages. Besides writing powerful systematic theology,[13] Anselm also wrote prayers that were very

[9]Stephen Gilbert Timothy Bulkeley, "The Image of God and Parental Images: A Dialogue Between Theology and Psychology" (PhD, The University of Glasgow, 1981), 180-182, 190-191; and Tim Bulkeley, *Not Only a Father: Talk of God as Mother in the Bible and Christian Tradition* (Auckland, N.Z.: Archer Press, 2011), chap. 4, 53–70.

[10]See e.g. Clement, *Paedogogus* 1:6 "A hymn to Christ the Saviour" (ANF2: 296).

[11]Migne, PG 58, 700. Chrysostom, *Hom. In Matth.* 76, 5.

[12]CC 40, 1431-1432; Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos,* 101, 8. CC 36, 153; 165; 212; and Augustine, *In Iohanis Evangelium Tractatus,* 15:7; 16:2; 21.

[13] Like the Monologion, which also contains discussion of the gender of the Godhead, Anselm, Jasper Hopkins, and Herbert Warren Richardson, *Anselm of Canterbury.: vol. 1. Monologion, Proslogion, Debate with Gaunilo, and Meditation on*

influential on later piety. In one of these, he begins by addressing St. Paul as he (Anselm) struggles with the knowledge of his own unworthiness to approach Jesus. He is aware that Jesus invites us, but he feels the gulf that his sinfulness creates separating him from God. (Remember, this was before Catholic piety began to circumvent the problem by approaching Jesus through Mary, his mother.)

Talking this problem out with St. Paul in his prayer, Anselm suddenly remembers that Paul describes himself (as did other apostles) as being like a mother to the churches he had founded.[14] Then he recognises that if Paul was like a mother,[15] Jesus is far more our mother because he suffered to give us "new birth." And further, if Jesus is like a mother, then Anselm really understands that he won't be turned away, for no mother will reject the child she bore.[16]

This thought that Jesus is like a mother because he suffers to give birth to us enabled Anselm to approach Christ. It also helped many others in succeeding centuries and was taken up by the great abbot, Bernard of Clairvaux, and from him entered as a regular part of medieval piety (especially Cistercian).[17]

What Anselm was doing in this prayer is in many ways very modern. For instance, many people living in the Philippines (I am told) find it difficult to approach Jesus directly. In Catholic circles, it is more common to approach Jesus' mother, Mary, and ask her to approach Jesus on their behalf. The feelings Anselm had of sinfulness, unworthiness, and the inability to approach a holy God are similar, yet his theological approach was very different.

The Catholic Church has "solved" the psychological problem by elevating Mary until she is something like a divine figure. And while Catholic dogma has been very careful to say she is not divine, nevertheless Catholic piety often acts as if she were. That move was a terrible mistake, for it minimizes the gulf that separates the human and the divine, making the Godhead something to be grasped (cf. Phil 2:6).

Human Redemption (London: SCM Press, 1974), 55-56 in which he reminds his readers "that there is no sexual distinction in the Supreme Spirit and the Word."

[14]Sometimes this involved birth-giving language (especially the verb *genao*), but often where they use milk-feeding imagery, which was a very common motif to speak of teaching in the Hellenistic world.

[15]E.g., Galatians 4:19; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8.

[16]Anselm of Aosta, *Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm with the Proslogion*, ed. Benedicta Ward (Penguin Classics, 1979), 358–371.

[17]See e.g. Caroline Walker Bynum, "Jesus as mother and abbot as mother: Some themes in twelfth-century Cistercian piety," *Harvard Theological Review*, 70, 1977, 257-284.

Anselm, because he was a great theologian, avoids that mistake by finding a way of thinking and talking about Jesus as mother. Thus, he does not need to approach Jesus' mother to talk to Jesus; he can go directly to Jesus himself. Psychologically, it is the same move (i.e., understanding that a divine mother figure cannot turn her child away); theologically, however, it is poles apart.

Trinitarian Motherly Theology

We need to again move on, for if we stop with Anselm, we risk not recognizing that this motherly understanding of the Godhead must be Trinitarian. As we have seen, theologians and pastors wrote of the Spirit as mother, of the Father as mother, and of the Son as mother. These three views were clearly put together at the end of the 14th and beginning of the 15th centuries by Julian of Norwich, who was a Christian mystic and an anchorite. (Anchorites cut themselves off from the world, not just in a monastery but completely, in order to serve and commune with God.) Living in a small room in the wall of a church, with people passing food in to her through a window, Julian's life was spent in prayer. As she prayed, she received a series of revelations about God. There are two versions of these revelations, and although it is not certain what their relationship is to each other, both seem to come directly from her rather than one having been edited by someone else. It is likely that the more complete version dates from the end of her life and fills out the earlier version. She titled her revelation "A Revelation of Love—in Sixteen Shewings," for it contains a meditation on the love of God. At the heart of her thinking about God, she uses motherly language and pictures.[18]

Julian was a good theologian, for she did not use motherly language and pictures only of one of the persons of the Trinity, thus sounding as if she was separating the Godhead into more male and more female persons. She is one of the first people (if not the first) to talk about each person of the Trinity as mother. Some of the earlier examples talked about the Father as motherly, some about the Son as motherly, and others of the Spirit as motherly, but they did not put these images together. In Julian, each of the persons is mother and the

[18]There are a number of editions and translations of Julian's work. This recent one includes both short and long texts; Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins, *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love* (Penn State Press, 2006).

whole Trinity motherly. Thus, she avoids gendering God and uses motherly language about God without risking splitting the Godhead.[19]

There was a move among some liberal theologians a few decades ago to talk about the Spirit as mother.[20] Such identification of feminine or female characteristics with one person of the Trinity alone is extremely dangerous and commits more than one heresy. By talking of each of the persons and of the Trinity as a whole as mother, Julian avoids these problems.

Strange Unspeakability

For at least 1,400 years, orthodox and respected Christian theologians and pastors could talk about God using motherly language and pictures. The Bible writers also used such language. Yet fairly soon after Julian, such talk becomes strangely silent. (In my research, I only found one example between 1450 AD and the 20th century.) This raises a significant question. Why was motherly talk of God suddenly unspeakable?

There was no decision by a church council, no major book or lecture providing arguments against such talk, no evidence that the Church discovered such talk had been mistaken, and no theologian in that time condemned such talk. Yet the use of motherly language did cease. I am not certain of the answer, but it does seem significant that this was also the time when devotion to Mary became quite widespread in Western Christianity.[21] Although there is no direct evidence that devotion to Mary replaced devotion to God as mother, the end of one form of devotion and the rise of the other are correlated and happened at the same period in the history of Western Christianity. The two are also related in that both offer a similar psychological benefit of a divine mother figure, making God more "approachable."

As I mentioned in an earlier lecture, there have been in recent years various highly respected Evangelical theologians who have

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[19]Bulkeley, "The Image of God and Parental Images: A Dialogue Between Theology and Psychology," 202–208; and Bulkeley, *Not Only a Father*, chap, 4, 53-76.

[20]See the discussion in Stanley James Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), chap. 7, especially around 291-293.

[21]For a brief history of the rise of devotion to Mary in the Catholic church, see David Lyle Jeffrey, "Hail Mary: Her moment of obedience triggered two millennia of reverence," in *Christian History* (2004) 83 http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/2004/issue83. For a much fuller treatment, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996.

written as if, at some point, the Church decided that it was wrong to talk about God as mother. However, this is not the case, and they provide no evidence beyond their own arguments that it ever has been or should be.[22] Besides the lack of evidence of such language being condemned, it is also true that many of the most respected Christian theologians in the first 500 years, several in the second 500 years, and quite a few in third 500 years were satisfied to use motherly language and pictures to speak of God. They were never condemned.

C.S. Lewis, Elizabeth Achtemeier and others have argued against such language in the context of debates about the role of women in the ministry of their churches. It seems to me that their position on the issue of appropriate language for God is influenced by their positions on the question of women in ministry and not by solid theological underpinnings. C.S. Lewis, in particular, is a clear thinker and writer; but in this case, I believe his very clarity betrays his mistake. The Christian God is not gendered, is beyond gender, and Lewis and Achtemeier risk reducing God to being, in some way or sense, male. If men are more like God than women are, then God is part of the group "males." And if God were part of this group, then God would be like many other beings. Such a "god" would no longer be God (the One and Only) but merely a god. If this were so, we would effectively return to the worship of Ba'al and might expect to include Asherah alongside him, and then we would have our divine father and mother figures. That is why this topic matters. It is the danger of idolatry inherent in envisaging God as male that really matters.

From my perspective, the main strength of the positions from which Lewis and Achtemeier argue is their concern that our language about God should not endanger "his" transcendence. If God is not "wholly other," then God is not God. And yet they seem to forget that the reverse is also true. God revealed "himself" as radically immanent through "his" incarnation in Jesus Christ. So unless our talk and

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[22]C. S. Lewis, *Undeceptions: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (ed. Walter. Hooper; London: Bles, 1971), 193; Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Female Language for God: Should the Church Adopt It?," *Transformation* 4, no. 2 (1987), 24-30; Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Why God Is Not Mother," *Christianity Today* 37, no. 9 (1993), 17-23; Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Exchanging God for 'No Gods': A Discussion of Female Language for God," in *Speaking the Christian God: the Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism* (ed. Alvin F. Kimel; Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1992), 1-16; and Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Female Language for God: Should the Church Adopt It?," in *The Hermeneutical quest: essays in honor of James Luther Mays on his sixty-fifth birthday* (ed. James Mays; Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1986), 97-114. See also other authors collected in Alvin F. Kimel, *Speaking the Christian God: the Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992).

picturing of God also expresses this immanence (at the same time as expressing the divine transcendence), then equally God is not God. As so often when we are presented with two extreme positions, both are wrong!

Notice that I am not asking that you reach the same conclusions I do, but rather that you consider the evidence and arguments and begin to draw your own conclusions. This issue is significant for two reasons. Firstly, if we get it wrong, we risk devaluing God from "the One and Only" to merely "a god"; and secondly, if we get it wrong, we make approaching God and experiencing 'his' love more difficult for many people. Both reasons are of such central importance that we ought not to remain uncommitted on this matter.

There are a number of theologians from the liberal end of Christianity who have thought and written extensively about this issue, but I cannot accept many of their conclusions. We need people from the Evangelical and Pentecostal end of the Christian spectrum to begin thinking about this matter, so that we can avoid worshipping a god who is merely male and avoid making it difficult for people who have had bad or absent fathers or who are/were very close to their mothers to approach and experience God to the full. Nothing is more important than these two things.

Conclusion

For most of the first one and a half millennia of Christianity, many of the most prominent theologians and pastors had no problem using motherly language and pictures to speak about God. And they used such language to describe each of the persons of the Triune Godhead. There was no decision taken at any council, nor did any theologian write a major work denouncing such talk. Yet around the time that Mary began to occupy a more central place in Catholic spirituality and theology, talk of God as motherly declined and disappeared until rather recently. This has allowed the growing of dangerous misunderstandings that God is, in some sense, more male or masculine.

Putting it positively, if we take up some of the ways in which the Bible and the theologians of the first 1,400 years of Christianity used motherly language and pictures to speak of God, we can again find ways to speak this otherwise unspeakable image of God. This can enrich our spirituality and deepen the ways in which we approach God. It can open us up to experiencing God in new ways, as such language did for 1,400 years. (We will return to this notion in the final lecture.)

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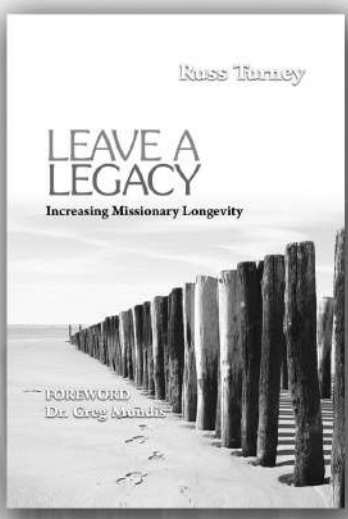

In this second volume of the new APTS Press Monograph Series, Dr. Russ Turney presents a compelling case study of why some missionaries leave the field far too soon. Normal attrition occurs because of health problems, retirement, or the obvious call of God to go elsewhere. However, Turney notes that far too often missionaries leave due to interpersonal conflicts with their colleagues or nationals, problems with authority and other issues that, Turney contends, could be significantly reduced. He then presents an excellent strategy for dealing with these and other issues, enabling missionaries to continue in their calling long term and finish well.

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[*AJPS* 17:2 (2014), pp. 163-170]

EXPERIENCING GOD AS MOTHERLY

By Tim Bulkeley

My previous lecture focused on ideas and called for critical and thoughtful engagement with the material being presented. In this final one, we change mental gears—moving from the head to the heart, from critical thinking to experience.[1] This is not always an easy transition and may perhaps be especially difficult for those who equate worship with singing (although it can also be trying when the medium is still spoken words). To make this lecture even more demanding, occasionally we will change gears back to thinking.

If we are still processing the central ideas of the other lectures and are not yet sure how to respond to them, I ask that, for this one, please leave the processing task temporarily in God's hands. Doing so will allow us to explore some of the possible 'experiencing' corollaries of the ideas presented and take up mental processing and critique of those ideas afterwards.

"Live theology" is lived. In a seminary context, it's too easy to believe that theology is merely about thinking and ideas. We have all those books and journal articles waiting to be read, and essays are marked largely on the clarity and organisation of ideas. Yet theology is not real if it stops at that level. For theology (from the Greek *theos* and *logos*, meaning to talk or think about God), thought about God that does not produce lives that express our love of God is dead. Theology is only real if we live it.

So, if the preceding lectures did lead us to the conclusion that it is appropriate for Christians to "think" about God as motherly, this one explores ways in which we might enable ourselves and others to 'experience' God as mother. It will do this using a few examples.

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[1]Because of this, unlike the previous lectures, there will be almost no footnotes to interrupt our reading and reflecting here. The evidence for what I say here was given in earlier lectures or it comes directly from the Scripture references or from an appeal to experience.

Stop

Why does this matter? We call God "Lord" so often that we sometimes behave as if God was a demanding boss or a teacher checking up to see if we've been good or not. One of the positives in occasionally picturing God as mother helps us to stop and reflect more.

Indeed, God is Lord, is demanding, and is holy, but we ought not to allow the recognition of these attributes to get us stuck in the mode of trying to reach God's standards. We should desire to aim for those standards because we love God, not because we hope or expect to attain good marks. For persons stuck on the treadmill of trying to please God by showing how good they can be, thinking of God as a mother offers a way out. We can only get off the Pharisee treadmill by recognizing that the God we have been trying to please is different. Those of us in theological education know that God is different; and if asked whether God demands that we reach certain standards to be worthy of "his" love, we know the answer with our heads. We probably even preach this gospel. But we do not always act as if we truly believe it. Knowing is not enough, for mere knowledge is not sufficient to change the way we act. Often, what we know with our heads our hearts may tend to deny. We need to change our hearts as well as our heads; we need to experience the Lord in other ways as well.

The word that is translated LORD in the Old Testament is not a title but a personal name, YHWH. It is like calling God "Tim" or whatever one's name might be. The Jews, wanting to avoid breaking the commandment against taking God's name in vain, stopped using the name and said "Lord" instead. One of the ways Israel failed to serve God rightly was that they came to believe that by obeying the commandments they could earn God's favour. Thus, when we use the title "Lord," we ought to somehow make ourselves aware that we are using God's name and expressing our personal and close relationship.

Psalm 131:1-3 A Davidic Song of Ascents

[1]O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, nor are my eyes haughty; I am not concerned with things too great and too difficult for me.

[2]But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul that is with me is like a weaned child.

[3]Israel, hope in the Lord now and forever.

Keep the words of this psalm in mind as I encourage all of us to explore what David was experiencing and then to share that experience. He describes Israel's relationship with God as similar to climbing up on God's knee as a toddler with its mother. God is experienced as mother (the word *'em* is used). The child here is not a baby or small child climbing onto its mother demanding to be fed. Instead, this is a weaned child who is pictured as one not expecting (let alone not demanding) provision of food from the mother.

In the same way, as we seek to copy the psalmist's experience, we are not asking God for things but rather are climbing on God's knee like a small child. Climbing onto mum, it is not because we want something but simply because we want to be close to mum. Do we have the picture? If so, I want us to do something strange. I want us to become quiet and still. Picture the thought of climbing up on God's knee and snuggling close to her. To ensure the experience is vivid, try to answer these questions: Did we climb up? Or did she reach down and lift us? How do we know that she loves us? How, without words, does she express that love?

We need to learn to be in the delightful, dependable presence of God, to practice enjoying God's presence like a small child enjoys its mother's presence. Because God loves us like a daddy and like a mum too, it will take time to explore and discover what this means. Our lives are busy, all sorts of needs pour in, and we risk always approaching God with these needs.

On the morning of this lecture, a friend of mine posted on Facebook that her cousin's baby was in hospital, and she asked for prayer for both baby and mother. Also, during the worship time preceding the lecture, we prayed for a superintendent whose wife had died a day or two before. It is quite right to respond to such requests with prayer, for God desires such. But it is also right to sometimes approach God with no requests, to simply enjoy God's presence.

If all our prayers are requests (i.e., supplication and intercession), that is not right. While parents are happy when their children ask for things they need, asking for things for others is a sign the children are growing into mature human beings; and parents need and want more than this. Since God is like a mother and a father, God wants more from us than just that we ask for things.

Numbers 11:1-15

Using a good recent translation, read first verses 1-11. Try to imagine the scene and what the people mentioned here are thinking and feeling. Why are they complaining? (Be fair to them; after all, sometimes we are less than 'fair' when we complain to God or friends or family! Putting ourselves in their situation....with the same monotonous diet day in and day out, their looking back and remembering the food in Egypt is understandable.) And to whom are they complaining at the start of the passage? Although it is within 'God's hearing,' are their complaints addressed to God?

What does Moses pray in verse 2? (The Bible tells us the circumstances but not the content of his prayer.) Also consider how Moses feels as he starts to pray. To whom do they complain in verse 4? Where do we find out about someone else hearing their complaints? What happens then? Can we understand how God feels? If we were God, what would we be planning at this point?

Now look at the following fairly literal version of verses 11-15, where Moses takes his overburdened feelings to God.

> [11]So Moses said to the LORD, "Why have you treated your servant so badly? How have I deserved this? The weight of the whole nation is on me.
> [12]"Did I conceive this whole nation? Did I give birth to them that you say to me, 'Carry them in your arms, as a nurse carries a baby she feeds, to the land you promised on oath to their ancestors'?
> [13]"Where am I to get meat to give to this whole nation? For they come whining to me and say, 'Give us meat to eat!'
> [14]"I am not able to carry this whole nation alone, they are too heavy for me.
> [15]"If this is how you are going to treat me, kill me at once and do not let me see my misery."

Does Moses' argument here really run like this (as I suggested it does): "God, this isn't my responsibility. I'm not their mother!" Try to list the reasons why this situation is difficult for Moses. Is he angry with God or the people or both? He seems caught between the people's demands, which he cannot fulfill, and God, who does not seem to be listening to their complaints.

Also, notice how the pronouns work in this narrative. Pronouns often express the relationships, and noticing them can draw attention to the interpersonal dynamics of a Scripture passage. This is particularly useful in narratives and in the prophets and letters. Three sorts of pronouns are used here—first person singular ("I," "me"), second person singular ("you"), and third person plural ("they," "them"). "I" and "you" in this prayer refer to Moses and God; this relationship is at the heart of the prayer. But 'they' are also involved, which makes the relationship problematic.

According to Moses, provision is the mother's job. He is not Israel's mother; if anyone is, it's God. Think how often Bible stories tell of God feeding people. . .Moses, Elijah, Jesus, even Peter's vision. Besides the stories, glance through some of the psalms and notice how many of them thank God for providing for the writer's needs.

God the provider is sometimes (as here) pictured as God the Mother. Provision of food and clothing was 'women's work' in the Ancient Near-East; and in many families, it still is. In the Bible, God's provision is not like that of a cafeteria but rather is direct and personal. Notice how this is so in Psalm 23; it is God who prepares the table. In other psalms, we are apt to overlook the direct and personal nature of the provision itself, instead seeing only the goal—that those provided for should be content or even joyfully happy. This too is like a mother providing for her family.

There is a tendency in many cultures to see a father's provision in more distant and enabling ways, while a mother's in more intimate and direct ways. In a caricature, the father earns the money that buys the provisions, but the mother does the shopping and prepares the food. In such cultural settings, a providence envisaged only as fatherly runs the risk of minimizing or overlooking the intimate and personal sort of providence that Christians experience daily.

The Little Things

Sometimes we are tempted to imagine that God only provides for those in "the Lord's work," like missionaries and ministers. The stories we hear in church of special acts of providence are often about persons who are doing something for God and needed something; they prayed and received what was needed. While such stories are important testimonies (and we should keep telling them), the idea that such provision is only for special needs or for special people is wrong.

In Kim Snider's lecture [which will appear in the next edition of this Journal], she quoted a woman who asked for a parking space. Years ago, a colleague told how she had forgotten where she put her keys and asked God for help finding them. I confess that at the time I thought. . .Hasn't God anything better to do than help persons careless enough to forget where they put their keys? I prided myself in trying to avoid making such a mistake by putting things in the same place each time. I believe my attitude was totally wrong…not only the pride, but also that God *does* care about little things. God's care is intimate, even caring about parking spaces (although perhaps not as often as we would like!).

In Matthew 5:45, Jesus claims that God provides for all, the good and the unrighteous alike. One exciting thing about the highly successful Alpha Program[2] is that, even before participants become believers, they are encouraged to pray for one another. Often, the experience of seeing their prayers answered convinces them of the reality of God as one who provides for *all* his children. (Mothers feed *all* their children, not only those who are good or hardworking!)

Many of us may see this unselective providence as fatherly, the reason being that we have been taught about Father God from the Bible. Culturally, however, fathers are usually expected to discipline and reward, while mothers are expected to provide for both good and bad children. That is why we need to put Moses' picture of God the Mother together with Jesus' teachings about sparrows and flowers. God's provision is easy to learn with our heads but hard to believe with our actions. It is also sometimes difficult to be thankful for this daily intimate providence. Children often take mother's provision for granted. (I am sad when I think how often I take God's providence for granted.)

In western culture, people are measured and graded all the time. (I know this is also true of some Asian cultures). Such evaluation is often expressed in monetary terms, for everything has a value. Not only items in shops have values assigned to them, but the worth of people is likewise measured. Is the CEO of Telecom really worth $1,000,000 every year? The fact that we even understand the question shows how deep is the instinct to compete and evaluate.

The result is that, in such a culture, we are tempted to try to *earn* God's blessing. Of course, this desire to earn God's favor is not unique to the West. It was present in ancient Israel and led to a religion of law-keeping; it is present in every human culture and so in every human

[2]An evangelistic course that explains what Christianity is about and invites participants to explore the faith. It began in the UK at an Evangelical Anglican church, but is used by churches all over the world and has resulted in many conversions.

religion. As a result, it creeps into the church. We substitute cheap grace that we can earn for the incalculably costly grace (bought by the death of Jesus) that God offers freely. Maybe as we learn to picture God as mother, we will learn that grace is not cheap. . .it is free!

Public as Well as Private

Our concern in this series of lectures has been our personal relationship with God. However, although seminaries may teach that God is not male, if our public worship language is expressed in male forms and presents only male images of God, it becomes more difficult for us to experience the full richness of God. Therefore, one of my concerns is that feminine language and pictures should also be found in our public worship. (Here I have only been focusing on motherly language and pictures, but there are other feminine images in both the Scriptures and the history of Christian thought and worship.)

At this point, we need to engage our minds as well as our spirits. For most of us, picturing God as father works really well. Likely one reason is that we have learned to imagine Father God in ways that take up some of the richness of Jesus' own talk of Father God.[3] There are other people, both those with bad experiences of fathers and those who have not been taught what Father God is like, for whom father language and pictures alone do not communicate this full depth. If all of our public God-language is cast in terms of "Father" and "Lord," then we risk people imagining God as a teacher grading our quality or a policeman checking our obedience to laws. So it is important that we find ways to enrich and deepen our expression of what God is like in public worship as well. Merely trying (where possible) to avoid sexist language is not enough. Many churches do that but this risks sounding either unisex or impersonal. Yet the truth of God is deeply and richly personal. Since readers of these lectures are present or future leaders in churches, if *we* do not find ways to broaden our worship language, no one else will.

Public worship both follows and shapes personal devotion. It is unclear which is cause and which is effect, since both are cause and effect, as the English question: "Which came first: the chicken or the egg?" suggests. For this reason also, it is important that the two do not get out of step with each other. Therefore, let's not only explore ways

[3]See the lecture: "God as Father in the New Testament."

to enrich and deepen our private devotion using motherly pictures of God, but also (after thought and prayer) find ways to incorporate this into public worship. For if relating to God as mother can deepen and broaden our experience of God, we should share this richer understanding with others.

For those like Baptists and Pentecostals whose worship style is largely about music and singing, it would be very helpful if there were a wider variety of pictures of God in our worship songs. I believe that currently many (or even most) of the people in our churches think of God as male.[4] Such a limited god cannot really be the God of the Bible. Although their understanding of God is not totally wrong, it should be closer to the reality of the biblical God.

Theologians and pastors are taking a cop-out on this issue. We know, write, and teach that God is not gendered, that God is beyond gender, indeed beyond everything we can imagine and think. However, our worship language does not reflect this truth…and it should! For theology that is not lived is dead and we worship the living God.

Conclusion

I hope in this series of lectures that we have begun to realize that God is richer and deeper than our language can express because human languages are simply incapable of expressing the full riches of God. I hope further that I have convinced all of us that adding "mother"—not so much the word as the idea—to our stock of word pictures we use is one way that we can enrich our experience of God. I conclude with the following double question: How can we experience this more for ourselves, and how can we encourage it for others?

[4]I have not researched this but many experiences suggest that it is true.

[*AJPS* 17:2 (2014), pp. 171-186]

HEALING IN THE LOWLAND PHILIPPINES: SOME CONSIDERATIONS FOR DISCIPLESHIP

By Dave Johnson

Introduction

In a recent seminar that Debbie and I conducted for pastors and mature lay leaders in the Bicol region of the Philippines, I posed the following question: "Suppose you prayed for someone who came to you for healing and when they were not healed, they went to a witchdoctor down the street and were made completely well. Afterwards, they come back to you and asked 'why could the witchdoctor heal me, but you could not?' How would you respond?" While the responses were not recorded, all understood the importance of the question and the worldview questions that lay behind it. Can witchdoctors heal? What is the source of their healing? Does God heal? What are the implications of healing? These are some of the questions that must be answered because behind these questions is the cultural reality that one's allegiance is given to whoever delivers the goods. How low-land Filipinos answer these questions, and many more like them, reveal a culture deeply rooted in animism and has enormous implications for Christian discipleship. This paper will attempt to at least outline answers to these questions from a biblical perspective and deal with the worldview issues that lay behind them.

While all of the field research used here, which was originally written up in my masters thesis and doctoral dissertation (Johnson 2000, 2004), was conducted among the Waray people of Leyte and Samar, every writer in the field accepts the premise that due to a similar cultural history and a common religion, Roman Catholicism, the cultural similarities of the lowland Filipino groups, including the Waray, far outweigh their differences (De Mesa 1987: Forward). Most

of the Filipino writers quoted in this study actually write from a pan-Filipino perspective.

The field research was limited to the Waray and thus, according to the standards of behavioral sciences research, technically can be generalizable only to them. However, due to the level of similarity in religious practices among lowland Filipinos, this research can be broadly used throughout the lowland cultures.

Since Catholicism did not impact the animistic mountain peoples of Northern Luzon to the same degree, and didn't even touch the folk Muslims in the south, the results of this study would be less true among these groups and are, therefore, beyond the scope of this paper.

The Basic Filipino Religious Worldview

Because all humans interpret the world and the Bible through their own cultural lenses, usually uncritically, it is vital for both Filipinos and foreigners who serve them to deeply analyze and understand Filipino culture, especially their religious worldview.[1] Since a comprehensive study of Filipino culture is well beyond the limitations of this study, focus will be given to their religious worldview with the understanding that worldview is the driving force behind the values and behavior of any culture.

Robert Schreiter (1985:130) gives an excellent description of the contours of an animist's worldview and belief system, which describes the Filipino situation well:

> One cannot, of course, describe the view of the world underlying popular religion [animism] in any exhaustive manner. There are, however, some characteristics that deserve special mention: (a) the world is seen as an interconnected and controlled place. No bad deed goes unpunished, no good deed will be unrewarded, for God sees all. (b) Concerns are concrete, and requests for divine aid are usually directed at immediate needs.

Because the universe is an interconnected whole, the line between the natural and the supernatural is thin, and at times, non-existent. This interconnection, according to Gailyn Van Rheenen (1991:131), includes the extended family, supernatural powers, nature and other

[1]I will use the term "Filipino culture" in the singular as a simple writing convention that actually refers to a composite of the lowland Filipino cultures.

humans. In Filipino thinking, the sacred and the secular are so blended that some anthropologists cannot differentiate between the two (Mercado 1975:25-26). If this is true, then it follows that living in close harmony with occupants of the other world would be critically important to Filipinos.

While most Filipino are Catholic, a closer look reveals many animistic practices that pre-date Catholicism and have become mixed with Catholic practices and teaching. Why is this so? Rodney Henry (1986:10) writes that while Catholicism dealt with the issues of ultimate concern, such as sin and salvation, it did not deal with issues of daily life such as sickness and healing, demon possession and a host of other things which affect Filipinos daily. They are aware that Nature plays by her own rules, and that these rules are handled by supernatural beings (Jocano 1981:25). Melba Maggay (1999:23) adds that "Filipino religion remains primarily a transaction of the powers." The average Filipino is at least as much concerned about these spirits as he is about salvation and sin. Thus these two religious systems have continued to co-exist, intermingled together, accurately described as folk Catholicism.

In the mind of the average Filipino, there appears to be little, if any, difference between Catholicism and folk practices. Jaime Bulatao (1992:6) admits in a non-critical way that after four centuries of Roman Catholicism, "The Filipino is still an animist at heart." According to Maggay (1999:14): "the liturgical synthesis between Catholicism and the indigenous consciousness was unaccompanied by shifts in religious paradigm. The indigenous mind, for the most part, simply assimilated the new elements within its own system."

This assimilation however, is selective. The Filipinos' inability to sharply distinguish between the elements of folk practices and formal Roman Catholic practices means that one cannot polarize these concepts as sacred and profane (Teleron 1972:134-135). Folk practices are adapted and modified according to what the average Catholic feels that he needs which suggests that these practices are anthropocentric rather than theocentric.

In order to make the the gospel understandable to the Filipino, these folk practices must be comprehended so that it can be communicated within their worldview. Since cosmology is an important part of worldview, the supernatural beings that make up that cosmology and how they interact with human beings must be understood.

Cosmology

Agaton Pal (1956:450-451), although his research on a rural Leyte community is dated, provides a useful, four tiered framework for conceptualizing the Filipino view of the spirit world. However, in the daily life of the average Filipino, these distinctions are often fuzzy or non-existent.

God

God, who created the world but is aloof and usually approached through a mediator, occupies the top tier. In many respects, the Filipino view of the spirit world is similar to the biblical view in that God alone is powerful and has no equal.

Benigno Beltran (1987:234) claims that Filipinos perceive God as merciful and feel that he is approachable but, for functional reasons, they defer to the Virgin Mary and the saints, reflecting the cultural norm that Filipinos with lower socioeconomic status use mediators to approach those of high status.

Looking closer, however, their view of God does not meet the biblical standard. Filipinos believe that the saints and other spirits work for God because, apparently, God needs help and may not have total control of the spirits, who require appeasement through sacrifice. God is therefore not perceived as being all powerful, although he is certainly more powerful than the rest. A major issue for the Filipinos is God's providence. Does he control the universe and the spirits that inhabit it? If so, does he do it alone? The complete answer to this question is well beyond the scope of this essay and will be confined here to the issue of healing.

Mary and the Catholic Saints

The second tier in Filipino cosmology consists of the Catholic patron saints who intercede before God on behalf of the people for the supply the people's felt needs. The Virgin Mary, though not mentioned by Pal, should also be placed here. She is widely considered to be the mother of all lowland, Catholic Filipinos and is believed to be more powerful than any spirit being except God himself. It would be difficult to overstate her role in the lives of the Filipino people. Both Mary and the saints are believed to control the weather, protect local communities from calamity, heal and help in many other ways. All town fiestas,

along with the religious processions and special masses that normally accompany them, are in honor of the saints, not God. As I will argue later, the Bible assigns these roles to God alone. If Mary and the saints are not who they claim to be, then their true identity must be unmasked, which will also be done in due course.

Other Spirits

Filipino cosmology's third tier is what may be referred to as this worldly spirit beings, of which there are legions, meaning that they are more likely to be involved in the affairs of people. Some spirits are considered always good and some are always evil, but the majority could be either, depending on the situation and whether or not they have been appeased through sacrifice.

Filipinos distinguish between demons and other spirits solely on the basis of what they do. Leonardo Mercado (1994:112) says that "the belief in good and bad spirits seems to reflect a dualistic paradigm of good and evil." If the spirit does something good, such as healing, it is assumed to be working for God. If a spirit inflicts someone with illness or even death, it is believed to be evil.

In one situation that I witnessed, a spiritist became possessed for a healing session.[2] When I asked another spiritist standing nearby what spirit had taken possession of her I was told that it was either the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Saint Peter, or the spirit of a local saint, and that this would not be revealed until the end of the session. When I asked whether or not the spirit might lie about its identity, my informant was adamant that it would tell the truth. But as long as the spirit brings healing to the sick, its actual identity is irrelevant to the Filipino.

In the Bible, two classes of spirit beings are identified, angels and demons, with Satan as the prince of the demons. The Scriptural basis of judgment as to whether spirits are good or not is their source, not their activities (cf. Lk. 11:14-28).

[2]Let me be quick to add that we only attended these sessions because the Lord has specifically led me to do this research for my masters thesis and assured my team and I that we were under a season of protection. During this season we requested a received a prayer covering from our supporters. I do not recommend doing this type of research without a specific word from the Lord. When I began to build on this research for my doctoral dissertation, the Spirit of the Lord made it clear that we did not have divine approval to do it again.

The Ancestors (*Anitos*)

The fourth tier are the *anitos*, the spirits of the ancestors, who are believed to live in unplowed fields and who must be appeased and coerced into leaving before any crops can be planted. Filipinos believe that they can either bless or curse the living. These are venerated on All-Saints Day, a national holiday where Filipinos flock to the cemeteries to leave food and lit candles on their graves, believing that the *anitos* return to earth and visit the graves on that day. The difference between these and the other classes of spirits is that the *anitos*, like the Virgin Mary and the saints, were once human, yet, because they have not been canonized by the Catholic Church, cannot be considered as saints.

Witchdoctors and Their Roles

Witchdoctors are believed to stand between the spirit world and the realm of humans. They can be described in two broad categories: herbalists and spiritists, known in Tagalog as *albularyo*, and *espiritista* respectively. Both are deeply connected to the spirit world through witchcraft and divination. However, there are a couple of notable differences. The herbalist, as the name implies, use herbs to bring healing while spiritists do not. Also, many spiritists testified to actually becoming possessed by a spirit, who performs the healing arts using the body and mouth of the spiritists, while this is not true of the herbalists. While we correctly state that these spirits are demons, the spiritists themselves do not, genuinely believing, in many cases, that the spirits are from God.

Theological Issues Related to the Religious Practitioners

Several worldview issues related to the religious practitioners were uncovered that must be analyzed in the light of biblical revelation. Here, however, our focus is limited to healing.

Spirit Possession or Altered States of Consciousness (ASC)

While doing the field work for my masters thesis research, several spiritists spoke of going into an altered state of consciousness (ASC) where they would become spirit possessed. On two separate occasions, my assistants and I were able to observe this phenomenon. Some

spiritists perform what I call physic surgery where they are actually able to put their hands inside a person's body and perform healing without the benefit of any medical instrument and without leaving a scar. This can only be done when a spirit has possessed a spiritist for that purpose.

Leonardo Mercado (1992:110) adds that after the medium returns to a normal state of consciousness, he or she cannot remember what they said or did while they were in the ASC, thus differing from the biblical prophets (i.e. Daniel, Ezekiel and John the Revelator) who always remembered what had happened, what the Lord had shown them or the message that they had been given. The same is true when the Holy Spirit came upon believers on the Day of Pentecostal in Acts 2. All of this raises issues related to contextual theology that go far beyond the purposes of this paper.[3] Where these spirits come from and who they work for are critical questions that must be raised and answered.

Supernatural Power

The most important issue in animism is supernatural power. Many of the spiritists who were interviewed in my thesis research indicated that the supernatural entity who called them, normally through a trance, dream or other esoteric experience, is also the one who empowers them for service. They maintain their power through rites, rituals and amulets. Many of them renew their powers annually by going to a mountain on Good Friday to practice their secret arts. That they can bring healing is too well documented and too widely believed to doubt, although the healings are not always permanent. If they can heal, where does this healing come from? From God? Is it demonic? Fortunately, the Scriptures have a great deal to say about these issues (Van Rheenen 1991:99).

Healing

The field research for my doctoral dissertation was conducted among two sample groups, the General Waray Population (GWP) of Leyte and Samar and the pastors, members and adherents (sympathizers in the Philippines) of the Assemblies of God (AG)

[3]For example, how would new Filipino believers understand the command to "be filled with the Spirit?," (Ephesians 5:18).

among the Waray. Respondents in both of these groups were chosen by random selection.

What Filipinos Believe About Who Can Heal

Their responses to the question of who can heal give some excellent insight into their worldview.

Table 1
WHO CAN HEAL PEOPLE?

	GWP (460 Resp)		AG (492 Resp)	
	YES	NO	YES	NO
1. A witchdoctor?	403 (87.6%)	57 (12.4%)	127 (25.9%)	363 (74.1%)
2. God or Jesus?	448 (97.4%)	12 (2.6%)	490 (99.6%)	2 (.4%)
3. A sorcerer?	141 (30.9%)	316 (69.1%)	45 (9.2%)	445 (90.8%)
4. A medical doctor?	453 (98.7%)	6 (1.3%)	473 (96.5%)	17 (3.5%)
5. The Santo Niño?	383 (83.4%)	76 (16.6%)	41 (8.4%)	450 (91.6%)
6. Other Saints?	380 (83%)	78 (17%)	41 (8.3%)	451 (91.7%)
7. The Virgin Mary?	382 (83.4%)	76 (16.6%)	51 (10.4%)	441 (89.6%)

Perhaps the differences in the worldview of these two groups are no more apparent than in their views of healing. Chi-square analysis, a statistical tool designed to compare similar sample populations, was used to determine whether the differences between the two groups was statistically significant. There were significant differences between the two groups on questions, one (χ^2=366.24, $p < .001$), two (χ^2=7.86, $p < .01$), three (χ^2=70.25, $p <.001$), four (χ^2=4.64, $p < .05$), five (χ^2=541.06, $p < .001$), six (χ^2=535.24 $p <.001$) and seven (χ^2=509.87, $p < .001$), respectively.

To begin with, the vast majority of the GWP believe that witchdoctors can bring healing, while only about twenty-five percent of the AG people agree, signifying a great difference of opinion on this issue. In Filipino society, to say that one believes that the witchdoctor can bring healing normally means that one would go to a witchdoctor if

one became ill, which may explain the relatively low score in the Assemblies of God population.

Both groups exhibited a strong confidence in the power of God to heal. But does only God do this? About eighty-three percent of the GWP believe that healing can also be done by the Virgin Mary, the Santo Niño or the saints. A small percentage of the AG people agreed with them. This means that they do not see much difference between these spirit beings, and, as long as one gets healed, the identity of the supernatural entity is irrelevant. Additionally, both populations know that doctors can heal but often cannot afford to go to them.

The witchdoctor is believed to be able to harness these spiritual forces in order to gain healing for mankind through their rites, rituals, and incantations. On the other hand, the vast majority of the AG population rejects both the help of the witchdoctor and the power of the other spirits, believing that God alone heals.

What the Bible Teaches About Healing

The rites and rituals practiced by the witchdoctors clearly reveal their connection to occultic powers (I Ki 18:19-26). If their power is not from God, what is its source? Jaime Galvez-Tan, a Filipino medical doctor states (1977:19) that about seventy percent of the illnesses treated by witchdoctors are illnesses from which people would normally eventually recover from anyway, even if they were not treated. Also, some herbs used have real medicinal properties that actually bring relief. But all of this does not answer the question in every case.[4] By what power, then, does the witchdoctor heal?

Since the witch doctors are not serving the one true God, the spirits with which they are in contact are demons (Deut. 32:17; cf. I Cor. 19:19-20). Can the powers of darkness heal? If so, what might be the devil's motive for healing?

In Exodus 7:8-24, the magicians in Pharaoh's court did imitate two of the miracles that were performed by God through Moses and Aaron. In Deuteronomy 13:1-3, Moses warns against following false prophets who are capable of doing signs and wonders. While healing is not mentioned here, the ability of the powers of darkness to do miracles, albeit with the intent to deceive, is real.

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[4]For documented cases of healing through witchdoctors in the Philippines, the reader is referred to Jaime Licauco's book *The Magicians of God*, (1982) although the book itself is deeply occultic and one should earnestly seek God's direction prior to reading it.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 (cf. Rev. 13:12; 16:13-14), Paul ascribes to the Anti-Christ the power to do miracles. The Revelation passages reveal that the Beast was healed of a fatal wound. While it does not say conclusively that this was a miracle, that the second passage says that the Beast was given power to do signs and wonders certainly implies it. Gordon Wright (1984:19) regards these miracles and signs and wonders as counterfeit, and he is right in the sense that they are not performed by God. There is no reason to suggest, however, that the miracles themselves are not real.

In looking at these verses, the possibility that the powers of darkness can heal cannot be denied. What is also clear is that the miracles are intended to deceive people into following Satan rather than God.

Does God heal? If so, why? In the Old Testament, the issue of healing begins with Exodus 15:26, where God states that Israel will be spared the plagues visited upon the Egyptians if they will obey him. Michael Brown (1995:237) notes that the Mesopotamian region at the time was full of healing deities. He adds (1995:238):

> In the ancient Near Eastern world, what distinguished the belief in Yahweh as Healer from the other purported healing deities was the OT's staunch monotheism. . . . emphasizing clearly that it was one God who both smote and healed, and he was anything but cavalier in his actions. Worship of any other so called god was not only forbidden, it was absolutely unnecessary. The Lord alone was sufficient. In fact, when Moses declared to this people that the Lord would be Israel's Healer [Exo. 15:26], he was not primarily turning his people away from human, medical help. . . . Rather he was cautioning them against looking to any other god for aid.

Only a few healings are mentioned in the Old Testament (i.e. 2 Kg. 5:3-14; 2 Kg. 20:1-7). By contrast, the New Testament records such occasions, the ministry of Jesus being replete with them. Michael Brown (1995:227) adds that Jesus' healing ministry was closely linked to the ministry of healing people from illnesses related to Satanic power and deliverance from demons (i.e. Lk. 13:10-17).

But why did Jesus heal? Matthew 9:35-38, for example, reveal that Jesus was motivated by love and compassion to respond to human need. But there is more. Colin Brown (1986:373) notes that the miracles of Jesus cannot be detached from His teaching or the course of

his ministry. Michael Brown (1995:225) adds that miracles validated Jesus' ministry:

> [This] was in keeping with the pattern of miraculous confirmation found throughout the OT. In spite of the possibility of counterfeit signs, wonders, and miracles. . . . God backed up his servants with demonstrations of his power, thus attesting to the truthfulness of their missions and calling (e.g., Ex 4:1-9, 29-31; Nu 16:28-35; IKi 18:36-39), and at the same time, triumphing over idolatrous and counterfeit powers (e.g., Ex. 8:16-19).

Following his line of thinking, miracles are used to attest to the reality that God is the all-powerful, one and only God that he claims to be. The others are exposed as imposters and frauds.

In Matthew 10:5-8, healing is one of the signs mentioned as heralding the arrival of the Kingdom of God. Jesus called his disciples together and, in sending them out for ministry, told them to announce the arrival of the kingdom of heaven and to cast out demons and heal the sick and even raise the dead It can be stated, then, that one of the purposes of divine healing is to reveal the power of God over sin and its results.

The purpose of healing may also be seen in an eschatological sense. Michael Brown (1995:218) notes that "the ministry of Jesus and his followers was a ministry of restoration and emancipation, to culminate ultimately in the glorious liberty of the children of God (Ro 8:19-23; 2 Co 5:1-5; Rev. 21:4; see Ac 3:19-21)." In divine healing, there is a sense of hope that the day will come when sin, sickness and evil will be no more!

The impartation of authority to the apostles in Matthew 10:1 has never been revoked. Healing is part of the ongoing ministry of the church. Donald Stamps (1991:1420) notes that:

> After Pentecost, the early church carried on Jesus' healing ministry as part of preaching the gospel (Acts 3:1-10; 4:30; 5:16; 8:7; 9:34; 14:8-10; 19:11-12; cf. Mk 16:18; 1Co 12:9, 28, 30; Jas 5:14-16). The NT records three ways that God's healing power and faith were imparted through the church: (a) the laying on of hands (Mk 16:15-18; Ac 9:17), (b) confession of known sin, followed by anointing the sick with oil and the

prayer of faith (Jas 5:14-16), and (c) spiritual gifts of healings given to the church (1Co 12:9).

If Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, then there is every reason to believe that God still heals today.

Implications for Discipleship

In looking back at Table One on page nine, a number of AG respondents indicated a belief that witchdoctors could heal people. In the dissertation, I manipulated the data again and discovered that the majority of these who held these believers were adherents, not members. Adherents are generally new believers who are attending evangelistic Bible studies. Throughout the research process their scores were consistently closer to the scores of the general population than that of the AG members, which is understandable given the newness of their faith. The scores, however, are different enough to suggest that a real paradigm shift in their thinking is taking place and that they are moving in the direction of a biblical worldview.

We also administered a second questionnaire to the AG population alone. One of the questions asked how many of them went to a witchdoctor before they came to know Christ and how many of them still go now that they know the Lord. Their responses were telling. Before they came to Christ, fifty-six point three percent went but only six point three percent continue to do so (Johnson 2013:173). This reveals that a radical paradigm shift has taken place in their worldview and suggests that the AG pastors have done a good job in discipling their people.

In the second questionnaire, the respondents were also asked what the key elements were in their coming to Christ.

Table 2
Key Elements in Conversion

Key Elements	YES	NO
Someone shared the gospel with you individually	397 (83.4%)	79 (16.6%)
You received Christ when you heard a sermon or attended a Bible study	431 (90.2%)	47 (9.8%)
You were healed	311 (65.8%)	162 (34.2%)
You were delivered from a demon	193 (40.4%)	295 (59.2%)
You experienced some other kind of miracle	321 (67.3%0	156 (32.7%)
Some demonstrated the love of God to you by helping you in practical ways	394 (83.5%)	78 (16.5%)

In analyzing the responses here, it must be considered that all of the 477 respondents gave more than one answer to this question, suggesting, perhaps, that they see salvation as a process more than as a single event.

The data reveals the need for a three point model of discipleship that focuses on power encounter through miracles, truth encounter through confrontation between the word of God and the Filipino's animistic worldview and a love encounter with God and his people for which animism provides no answer. Since Filipinos have a holistic view of life, every aspect of this model must be in operation in our local churches. A full description of this model and how the various points interact with each other is well beyond the limits of this article but power, truth and love encounters and are necessary to bring permanent change at the worldview level. This will not happen overnight. Biblical discipleship is a life-long process of discovering who God is and who we can become and must be thorough, requiring time, love and patience.

The application of this model, however, will not bring permanent change unless there is one more encounter—an allegiance encounter. The core issue of Christianity is allegiance. De Mesa (1987:192) states that allegiance to God must result in total transformation and that to hold back in any area is to short circuit the process. The Scriptures are clear that God demands total allegiance, whether he heals or not, and will tolerate no rivals (i.e. Exo. 20:4-6; Lk 14:25,26; Jn 14:6).

The good news is that no other gods are needed. All that we need can be found in Him. Not only is he our healer, he alone controls the

weather and he is absolute Lord of the spirits (Gen. 1-3; Phil. 2:9-10). While more elucidation is necessary to bring this out more fully, all of the Filipinos' felt needs, which are currently addressed through Catholic images and animistic practices, can be met through a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ, which is what appears to be happening among the AG population that was surveyed.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to explore the issues for Christian discipleship as it relates to healing in the animistic context of the lowland Philippines. A brief contour of an animistic worldview formed the backdrop of the study, which was also informed by actual field research. The answers to the questions as to whether God and witchdoctors can heal and what the source of their power is have been dealt with, as well as the need to answer God's call to give our allegiance to him whether he heals or not. Since God is all that the Bible says he is and to him alone is our worship, honor and allegiance due, the words of the apostle Paul provide a fitting conclusion to this study:

> Therefore God also has highly exalted Him [Jesus] and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9-11 NKJV).

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THE HISTORY OF THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN MYANMAR: DEVELOPMENT OF THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD BIBLE SCHOOLS

By Saw Tint Sann Oo

Apart from encouraging Pentecostal ministers to depend on the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit, providing formal theological training for them is crucial for maintaining Pentecostal unity in faith and effectiveness in missions. Moreover, a proper theological training can help them to be watchful of false teachings so that they will be able to nurture Pentecostal believers with sound doctrines. For example, the problem of "Jesus Only" teaching, which the Assemblies of God faced during the period of its inception, was solved by studying the Bible and Church history that resulted in the declaration of the statement of faith.[1] Therefore, theological education at all levels is necessary in the world of Pentecostals. In this paper, I will argue that since the inception of the Assemblies of God mission in 1931 in Myanmar, the leaders themselves have seen the importance of theological education regardless of anti-intellectualism among some of its ministers and believers in Myanmar. This claim will be explained and supported by tracing the development of the Assemblies of God Bible schools in Myanmar. Before proceeding to the history of theological education of Myanmar Assemblies of God, I will discuss a common Pentecostal attitude toward higher education and provide an overview the history of Pentecostal theological education in the context of American Pentecostalism with a special reference to the Assemblies of God.

[1]William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve: The Story of the Assemblies of God,* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1971), 114-21.

Pentecostal Attitudes Toward Higher Education

The majority of Pentecostals have had conflicting views on higher education, "with many regarding it with open suspicion."[2] Several factors lie behind this ambivalence. One of the factors may be the influence of anti-intellectualism, which sprang out of the fear of most Pentecostals that "education would produce carnal pride."[3] There are still a number of Pentecostal ministers in Myanmar who oppose formal theological education claiming that formal education spoils Pentecostal ministers. This anti-intellectualism also used to prevail among some fundamentalists as a by-product of the Fundamentalist-Modernist debate. Although Vinson Synan says, "the Pentecostals emerged without the deep anti-intellectual bias that distinguished much of the conservative Protestantism after 1925,"[4] we should not overlook its influence on the Pentecostals.

Second, many Pentecostals have felt that the Pentecostal experience is more important for ministry and mission than formal education. As a result, although they may not oppose higher education, they consciously or unconsciously refuse to support it.[5]

The third factor that lies behind the ambivalence toward higher education is the misunderstanding of the doctrine of the "imminent return of Christ." This doctrine, for many early Pentecostals, led to the sense of urgency for world evangelism. As a result, it prompted many ministers to leave their educational endeavors and become engaged in proclamation of the Gospel of Christ.[6] Since most of them were not well prepared, they had little success in their fields.

Fourth, some key Pentecostal leaders did not have a formal theological education. For example, a famous Pentecostal evangelist, Smith Wigglesworth of England, who had a great influence on Pentecostalism not only in Great Britain but also in other places like Australia and New Zealand, was semi-literate. He had never read a book other than the Bible. These kinds of persons, for many Pentecostals, became models of anti-intellectualism. Indeed, God can

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[2]*Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, s.v. "Bible Institutes, Colleges, Universities," 57-65 by L. F. Wilson, n.p.

[3]Menzies, *Anointed to Serve*, 141.

[4]Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 207.

[5]*Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, s.v. "Bible Institutes, Colleges, Universities," by L. F. Wilson.

[6]Ibid.

use anyone whether he is well educated or not. However, it is not to be taken for granted that God will readily use someone without formal theological education.

Overview of Pentecostal Theological Education

Although the Pentecostals have been ambivalent about higher education, they have felt the need of Bible training for new converts as well as for new leaders. This positive attitude is reflected in the Pentecostals' keen interest and involvement in publication.[7] Printed materials have been the first means used by the Pentecostals in their ministry of theological education.

Moreover, Pentecostal ministers and missionaries have conducted formal theological training in their churches or in their mission fields. Generally, in the early years of the Pentecostal revival, there were two types of formal theological education system used by the Pentecostals to equip their new converts. The first type is a short-term Bible school system – normally three months – in which the students study the Word of God and involve themselves in practical church ministry and evangelism. The second type is a two- or three-year Bible institute (or missionary Bible school) system that offers diploma programs.[8] These schools focused their attention more on spiritual, practical, and biblical lessons than on critical analyses or academic excellence. "A greater emphasis was placed on indoctrination than intellectual development, to avoid compromise and to assure the propagation of the full gospel."[9] Moreover, a strong emphasis on mission galvanized the students to leave immediately for the mission fields once they had graduated.[10]

These Bible schools and institutes were generally small. The majority of them received little or no financial support from their denominations. Both the schools and the students alike had to run by faith. As a result, the "graduates were ready to make sacrifices, live modestly, and even work with their hands to support their families and

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[7]Gary B. McGee, "Pentecostals and their Various Strategies for Global Mission: A Historical Assessment," in *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective,* edited by Murray A. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 213.

[8]Menzies, *Anointed to Serve*, 136-42; and *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, s.v. "Bible Institutes, Colleges, Universities," by L. F. Wilson, n.p.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid.

build churches."[11] However, some poorly trained ministers did not finish well in their ministries. Moreover, these poorly prepared ministers were not attractive to intellectuals. Consequently, the Pentecostal movement became a middle and a lower class movement.

By World War II, Pentecostal leaders had come to realize the need of providing higher theological education. Prior to that time, there were few Bible colleges run by Pentecostal denominations in the United States of America.[12] By this time, the American Assemblies of God leaders had already seen the need of higher theological education.[13] But it wasn't until 1949, that the first Assemblies of God Bible college level school, Southern California Bible College (now Vanguard University) opened that offered a four-year B.A. in Bible.[14] Now, like other Pentecostal denominations, the Assemblies of God is engaged in providing high-level theological education programs (graduate schools, seminaries, etc.) to equip their leaders with better tools while being sensitive to the leading and the work of the Holy Spirit.[15] One of the examples is the Far East Advanced School of Theology in the Philippines, which was opened in 1964 by the Assemblies of God to offer Bachelor degree programs, with extension programs in some countries in the Far East. In 1978, the school was upgraded to offer masters degree programs. The name of the school was changed to the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary in 1989.[16] These developments also suggest that "the Assemblies of God is concerned not merely with education, but with "educational evangelism" since the two cannot be separated."[17]

To summarize, most Pentecostal Bible colleges and seminaries have their origins as short-term Bible schools. Then they were upgraded to two or three year diploma level Bible institutes, and then to Bible colleges. The common primary purpose of the schools has been to assist the students to heighten their sensitivity to the work of the Holy Spirit through their lives and to increase their knowledge of the

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[11]Ibid.

[12]Menzies, *Anointed to Serve*, 136-40.

[13]M. Paul Brooks, "Bible Colleges and the Expansion of the Pentecostal Movement," *Paraclete* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1989): 13.

[14]Menzies, *Anointed to Serve*, 355.

[15]McGee, "Pentecostals and their Various Strategies for Global Mission," 214.

[16]Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, *Catalog 1999-2002* (Baguio, Philippines: APTS, 1999), 1.

[17]Robert E. Ferguson, "Advanced Theological Training by Extension in the Far East Mission Field of the Assemblies of God" (term paper, Springfield, MO: Central Bible College, 1976), 5-6.

Bible so that they may be effective and successful in their ministries and missions.

Biblical Foundations

The necessity of theological education for the lay people as well as for the ministers is has a solid biblical foundation. There are many passages in the Bible that give support to theological training. Here, examining two of these passages will suffice.

The majority of the Pentecostal leaders take II Timothy 2:2 – "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others"[18] – as their motto and biblical basis for providing the new leaders with theological education. The passage is didactic, or instructional. This means that it is imperative for ministers in any setting – in churches or in mission fields – to provide their people with sufficient theological training. Moreover, the language of the passage clearly suggests that theological education, in other words, teaching the Word of God with practical application, is an ongoing process. Also, the leaders should not assign the ministerial responsibilities to the new ministers without providing them a proper theological and ministerial training.

The second passage, Acts 18:24-28, talks about the theological training of Apollo. He was an educated Alexandrian Jew who partially had the knowledge of the gospel of Christ. Moreover, he was really enthusiastic and fervent about proclaiming the good news. "He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately . . . (v. 25)." This passage suggests that Apollo had already had a theological training before, and so he was able to teach about Jesus accurately.[19] However, when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they immediately realized that Apollo still lacked some knowledge about Jesus. Thus, they invited him to their home and shared with him more about Jesus so that his knowledge would be complete and adequate for the ministry (v. 28). This implies that even receiving theological training one or two times may not be adequate. The more training one receives, the better he is equipped for a more effective ministry. Therefore, we can conclude that theological training is not optional for a minister, but compulsory.

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[18]All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

[19]Stanley M. Horton, *The Book of Acts*, The Radiant Commentary on the New Testament (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1981), 218.

Development of the Assemblies of God Bible Schools in Myanmar

With the Pentecostal history and the theological issues serving as a backdrop, I will now detail the history and development of the Bible Schools in Myanmar.

The Early Bible Schools

The early part of the Assemblies of God mission to Myanmar can be linked to the ministries of the Assemblies of God missionaries in the Upper Salween River Valley of southwest China. The Assemblies of God mission first came into the northern part of Myanmar (Kachin State[20]) in 1931, when a Chinese preacher, Paul Yong and a Lisu preacher, Timothy, were sent from southwest China by an American Assemblies of God missionary, J. Clifford Morrison, who was working in that area.[21] Prior to that time, a few Assemblies of God missionaries, such as Ada Buchwalter and Leonard Bolton, were able to make a few trips into the northern part of Myanmar by crossing the border to minister to Lisu and other tribal people. However, it is not certain that these trips had a connection with a definite history of Assemblies of God in Myanmar.[22]

Since 1931, the Assemblies of God mission had flourished in northern Myanmar among Lisu, Rawang, and other Kachin tribes. When Morrison paid a first visit to that area in 1941, there were already not less than 500 Pentecostal believers in that region. The ministries among these Lisu people were first carried out by "Lisu Bible students and evangelists who would travel among the newly developing churches and then return to the China side for more training themselves."[23] Meanwhile, because of religious persecution by communist Chinese, the influx of Lisu Assemblies of God Christians emigrated from southwest China to Myanmar. They brought "with them their Scriptures, song books, simple catechisms, and vibrant

[20]The Kachin people group comprises of the Jing Paw, Lisu, Rawang, Maru, Law Waw, La Chaik and other tribes.

[21]Chin Khua Khai, "The Growth of Churches in Myanmar with a Special Reference to the Assemblies of God" (Th.M. thesis, Los Angeles: International Theological Seminary, 1991), 76; and Leonard Bolton, *China Call* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1984), 213.

[22]Glenn D. Stafford, "A Brief History of the Assemblies of God of Burma" (term paper, Springfield, MO: Central Bible College, 1977), 1-2.

[23]Bolton, *China Call*, 214.

testimonies"[24] and so they had sufficient tools for further evangelism and Christian education.

In 1947, Morrison entered Myanmar with his family to begin his permanent mission among Lisu and other tribes in Kachin State.[25] He settled in Maral Dam (Miraldum) village of Khawlungphu Township. As the missionary saw the pressing need of Bible training for new converts and new national leaders, he opened short-term Bible schools in various places.[26] He first opened two Bible schools around 1954, one in Maral Dam and the other in the Hpang Lang Wa (Palawa) with about 200 students in both schools. Geraldine Morrison, his daughter, conducted the Bible school in Maral Dam. Glenn D. Stafford, an American Assemblies of God missionary to Myanmar, who came in 1957, records, "These schools taught 3R's [i.e. basic elementary school subjects] and the Bible. The primary purpose was to prepare workers for the ministry."[27] Some secular courses were also offered to fulfill government requirements (i.e., the integration of the Bible school and the primary school). In fact, most of the students came to receive primary education. The students were self-supporting and they had to bring their own food and other supplies.[28] A third short-term Bible school was opened in Putao after Morrison moved there.[29] Besides the three Bible schools, the Morrisons conducted annual one-month preacher training schools and all ministers were required to attend.[30]

These schools produced many Pentecostal leaders who would later sustain and continue the ministry in Myanmar with only the help of the Holy Spirit when all foreign missionaries were evacuated from the country by the government in March, 1966. At that time, the Myanmar Assemblies of God had 180 churches with 12,000 members. But only one and a half year later, in September 1967, when Maynard L. Ketcham who was then Field Secretary for the Far East of American Assemblies of God from 1955-1970 visited Myanmar again, there were already 300 churches with 25,000 members.[31]

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[24]Ibid., 213.

[25]Ibid., 214.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Stafford, "A Brief History of the Assemblies of God of Burma," 4.

[28]Foreign Mission Dept., Assemblies of God, *Burma* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1960), 8-9.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Stafford, "A Brief History of the Assemblies of God of Burma," 5.

[31]Maynard L. Ketchem, "Burma Revisited," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 16 June 1968, 8.

Evangel Bible Institute in Myitkyina

The Bible school in Putao was upgraded and moved to Myitkyina, the capital city of Kachin State (Northern Myanmar), in September 1965.[32] The school, which offered a three-year diploma program, was opened there as an all-Myanmar Bible school and named "Evangel Bible School." Evangelism, pastoral ministry, and Sunday school teaching were the primary foci of the curriculum.[33] The establishment of the school was coordinated by Ray Trask, another American missionary who came into Myanmar in 1961.[34] Again, the students had to bring their own supply such as rice, chickens, and goats.[35] A minister from Yangon, Walter Myo Aung, who graduated from the Bible Institute of Malaya in Malaysia, was one of the Trask's colleagues and became the principal of the school in 1966 when the Trasks had to leave the country.

Since that time, the School has been under the supervision of the General Council of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar. It was renamed "Evangel Bible Institute" some years later and offered two-year as well as three-year diploma programs. Apart from offering courses recommended by Asia Pacific Education Office, the school has added more courses on ministry and evangelism according to the need. Students are required to take turns preaching in chapel services. In addition, they are required to participate in the ministries of local churches and in various types of evangelism every weekend.[36] The local churches work closely with the school. The students help these local churches by participating in their ministries, some as pastors, some as Sunday school teachers, etc. In fact, most of the churches in Myitkyina were founded with the help of the students of Evangel Bible Institute.[37]

Although the school had been successful and efficient in producing well-trained ministers, the leaders realized that diploma level education

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[32]Janet Walker, "The Message Came 50 Years Ago," *Mountain Movers*, January 1981, 8.

[33]Khai, "The Growth of Churches in Myanmar with a Special Reference to the Assemblies of God," 93.

[34]Stafford, "A Brief History of the Assemblies of God of Burma," 8.

[35]Maynard L. Ketchem, "Spotlight on Burma," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 23 January 1966, 7.

[36]Teddy Nang Hee, Academic Dean of Myitkyina Evangel Bible Institute, interview by author, 12 August 2000, Manila, Philippines.

[37]Ngwa Ye Yaw, General Secretary of the General Council of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar, interview by author, 2 September 2000, Yangon, Myanmar.

was not adequate for the church in the long run in a fast developing world. In 1993, seeing the need of providing higher theological education to the ministers, the General Council and the school board decided to offer a bachelors degree as an extension program of Evangel Bible College in Yangon (see below).[38] At that time, the principal was L Joseph, one of the Rawang ministers. After offering some of its graduates with supplementary courses for three years (following ICI curriculum and lecture guides), Evangel Bible Institute of Myitkyina and Evangel Bible College were able to confer 36 students with B.A. in Theology degree in 1996 when the General Council annual conference was held on the school compound. The General Superintendent, Myo Chit, together with Ronald Maddux, the Area Director for Peninsular-Asia of American Assemblies of God, was present at the graduation.[39] In the same year, the General Council approved to upgrade the school to a college level and to offer their own B.Th. program,[40] but the school continued to offer the extension program of Evangel Bible College until 1999. In that year, the school was able to graduate twelve students with B.A. in Theology. Now, having a sufficient number of qualified instructors, the school has begun its own B.Th. program. Seventeen students have enrolled in the program in addition to ninety students who have enrolled in the diploma programs.[41] Up to this day, the school has graduated over 998 students with a Diploma in Theology, 124 students with a Certificate of Theology, two students with a Graduate of Theology diploma, and 148 students with B.Th.[42] More than ninety percent of these graduates are currently serving the Lord in Assemblies of God churches all over the country.[43]

From a Youth Camp to Evangel Bible College

In Yangon, the capital of Myanmar, the first Assemblies of God mission was begun in 1956 by Leonard Bolton and his family. They started two home churches in the city. When they moved to Mogok, Walter Erola, a Finnish American missionary, took care of these home

[38]Minutes of the General Council Executive Presbytery meeting 2/93, 17-22 November 1993, 5.

[39]Durka Bahadu, Principal of Myitkyina Evangel Bible Institute, interview by author, 18 July 2000, Baguio City, Philippines.

[40]Minute of the General Council Executive Presbytery meeting, 8-10 June 1996, 6.

[41]Durka Bahadu, interview by author, 12 August 2000, Manila, Philippines.

[42]Report of Evangel Bible Institute in Myitkyina to the General Council, 7 August 2000; And Taik Chun Sein, interview by author, 12 January 2014, Yangon, Myanmar.

[43]Durka Bahadu, interview by author, 12 August 2000, Manila, Philippines.

churches. In July 1957, a new missionary, Glenn Stafford, and his family arrived in Yangon to oversee the Yangon mission field and Erola went back to Mogok.[44] The mission in Yangon was gradually growing. In 1965, a national minister, Myo Chit joined the church as an assistant to Stafford. The Staffords opened a thirteen-week short-term Bible school in Yangon during the rainy season in 1963. They conducted this school for three years until Myitkyina Evangel Bible School was opened.[45]

In 1966, all foreign missionaries had to leave the country, and the Yangon church –now Evangel Church– was left in the hands of Myo Chit. For a number of reasons, the attendance dropped to a low of twelve during the time of transition. But the Lord blessed Myo Chit and the church as the attendance began to grow rapidly again. In 1972, he opened the Evangel Bible Training School (also known as "a training camp" or "a youth camp") to provide a short-term Bible training to the new converts and the young people on premises donated by a family for this purpose. Apart from studying the Bible, the trainees went out to conduct street evangelism every Monday. Later, the school offered three-month Bible courses for ministers. Major activities of the school were Bible training, fellowship, and worship.[46] The graduates of this school were "fervent witnesses for the Lord."[47] Many of them went to various regions in Myanmar to start evangelistic outreaches there. As a result, many new Assemblies of God churches were born in these regions.[48]

Great leaders have great visions, and correctly see the needs of the Church. Of the short-term Bible school opened in Yangon, Myo Chit, then General Secretary of the General Council, said, "This short-term Bible school could by no means substitute for specialized and systematic training."[49] He had had a vision to open a college level Pentecostal theological and ministerial training school for Assemblies of God ministers.[50] Until 1979, Evangel Bible Institute in Myitkyina was the only Assemblies of God Bible school available for the

[44]Bolton, *China Call*, 200; and Stafford, "A Brief History of the Assemblies of God of Burma," 6.

[45]Ibid., 8.

[46]Myo Chit, "The Youth Camp That Became a Bible School," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 29 November 1981, 20.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Ibid., 21.

[49]Ibid.

[50]Myo Chit, General Superintendent of the General Council of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar, interview by author, 8 September 2000, Yangon, Myanmar.

Assemblies of God ministers, which offered a diploma program as the highest theological training for them. Most of the Assemblies of God ministers in Myanmar are the graduates of that school.

The door was opened for the establishment of a college level Bible school when Myo Chit was able to discuss the matter with Wesley Hurst, who succeeded Ketcham as the Field Director for the American Assemblies of God in the Far East in 1970, and George Flattery of the International Correspondent Institute (ICI) in 1976. They agreed to open an Assemblies of God Bible college in Yangon that would offer the ICI college level program.[51] The matter was brought to one of the General Council executive presbytery meetings in that year for further discussion and approval. Hurst, who was present in the meeting, shared his experience as follows:

> When I was in Burma the brethren asked about advanced studies for intellectuals. Our Bible school up in the mountains is a typical diploma or sub-diploma level. But there are many intellectuals, university graduates, some with Masters' degrees, that want to study the Bible. The Executive Committee of the national church asked if we would approve their sending students to the Baptist Seminary, supplementing their studies with Pentecostal subjects taught in the local church by Myo Chit . . . [Hurst asked] 'Is the Baptist Seminary fundamental?' . . . 'Do they believe in the virgin birth, the resurrection, the born again experience, the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. . . . ?' They dropped their heads.[52]

Finally, the General Council decided to open its own four-year college level Bible school in Yangon with the cooperation of American Assemblies of God as a branch of ICI (Now Global University). The three-month Bible courses were phased out and the college level Bible school was opened with twenty students on August 2, 1979 on the premises of Evangel Bible Training School. The name was changed to "Evangel Bible College." Myo Chit served as Chairman of the school committee and Hau Lian Kham, an Assembly of God pastor in Tedim, Chin State (northwest Myanmar) served as principal. The two leaders also served as the only professors at that time. Then a few years later Mary Hau Lung Cin, wife of Hau Lian Kham, Dora Moses, a graduate

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[51]Ibid.

[52]Wesley Hurst, "Burma: A Field Report to the School of Missions" (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God, USA, School of Missions, 1976, photocopied), 2.

of FEAST and Kyi Wynn, a graduate of Myanmar Institute of Theology, joined the faculty.

The primary purpose of the school was "to assist both in the spiritual and intellectual development of young people who recognize God's call in their lives" and the theme of the school was II Timothy 2:2.[53] At first, the whole ICI curriculum and materials were used. Two years later under the supervision of the General Council, the school and ICI agreed to revise the curriculum. According to the agreement the ICI courses would make up seventy-five percent of the whole curriculum, and the remaining twenty-five percent would be courses written and created by the school that were relevant to the Myanmar context. Examinations for ICI courses were sent to the international office for grading and it conferred the degree, B.A. in Bible-Theology. In 1985, Evangel Bible College graduated seventeen students with B.A. in Bible-Theology. George Flattery of ICI was present in that first commencement, and conferred the diplomas on the graduates. About 1990, the school introduced its own B.A. in Bible-Theology program, while it also continued to offer the ICI program.

Dora Moses became acting principal about 1987 when the Khams left for the Philippines to do their graduate studies at FEAST/APTS and the Asia Graduate School of Theology (AGST). In 1994, Hau Lian Kham finished his studies and came back to the country to resume the responsibilities of the principal. In 1996, when Hau Lian Kham was called to be with the Lord, the General Council approved the appointment of his widow, Mary, as acting principal.[54] Now the school has five full-time instructors. The focus of the school curriculum has been on ministry and Pentecostalism. Apart from offering courses recommended by Asia Pacific Theological Association, the school also offers courses relevant to the Myanmar context like Myanmar Church History, Buddhism, Cults and Occults, Signs and Wonders, Spiritual Warfare, Christian Spiritual Formation, etc. The school also encourages the students to participate in local church ministries.[55]

Throughout the history of Evangel Bible College, the majority of faculty members – at least seven of them – have been graduates of APTS. In fact, all who have served as principals are APTS graduates. In 2002, seeing the need of offering graduate programs for local ministers, the General Council invited APTS to start an M.A. Extension

[53]Ibid.; and Myo Chit, "The Youth Camp that became a Bible School," 21.

[54]Minutes of the General Council Executive Presbytery meeting, 8-10 June 1996, 6.

[55]Mary Hau Lun Cing, Acting Principal of Evangel Bible College, interview by author, 6 September 2000, Yangon, Myanmar.

Program in Yangon with Evangel Bible College as host institution. The first cycle of APTS extension program began in 2003 with eleven students at Evangel Bible College and the second cycle in 2007 with twelve students. Altogether, the APTS Extension Program has graduated eight students with M.A. in Ministry so far and two of them have finished their M.Div. on campus in Baguio, Philippines. In this way, the students have been able to enjoy studying under international scholars and receive high quality internationally recognized theological education. These facts suggest that the General Council has worked closely with APTS to fulfill its mission of theological education.

Again, according to the need of offering residence graduate programs to the students in Myanmar, with approval from the General Council and the Board of Directors, Evangel Bible College was able to start the M.A. and M.Div. programs in the 2013-14 school year with thirteen students. The school is currently making an arrangement with APTS to offer joint M.A./M.Div. programs with the aim that the student will receive internationally recognized high quality education.

Up to this day, the school has graduated around 288 students with B.A. in Bible-Theology degree including the 38 students who received their degree from ICI. While, most of the graduates are serving in Assemblies of God churches in various places in the country, some of them have continued their studies abroad. The graduates are serving the Lord not only locally but also inter-denominationally and internationally.

Bible Schools in the Chin State

Pentecostal revival broke out in Chin State, the northwestern part of Myanmar, in 1970s as a result of the ministry of Hau Lian Kham and the evangelistic crusades conducted in different towns (such as Kalay, Tedim, Falam, Haka, Tamu, and etc.) in that region by Myo Chit and his colleagues. By 1978, twenty-five new Assemblies of God churches were founded there.[56]

[56]Janet Walker, "Pentecost in the Land of Pagodas," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 12 March 1978, 17; and Khai, "The Growth of Churches in Myanmar with a Special Reference to the Assemblies of God," 99-105.

Maranatha Bible College

The growing number of churches in the Chin State caused the church leaders in that region to consider how they could provide the new ministers and lay people with theological training. Most of the new ministers were not able to afford to travel and study in Myitkyina or in Yangon. Moreover, many of them were not qualified to study at Evangel Bible College in Yangon.[57] The leaders also had a vision to train evangelists who would go and plant new churches in various places throughout the country.[58]

Thus, in 1987, the Assemblies of God of Kalay Section, conducted Maranatha Seminar for three months with sixty students in Kalay and presented a certificate to the participants. Then the faculty proposed the section to open a permanent school to offer diploma level training. Due to the growing needs, the section approved the proposal and opened Maranatha Bible School, which would offer a three-year Graduate of Theology (G.Th.) program. Tun Go Lian was appointed as principal. The primary purpose of the school was to provide an adequate theological education to those who have committed themselves to the work of God. [59] However, the school first offered three-month short-term Bible courses. Then the curriculum was gradually upgraded to three-year diploma (G.Th.) program. During the school breaks, the students were required to participate in practical outreach ministries in various places where there were no Assemblies of God Churches. They were sent in groups to these places to preach the gospel to the people there. If churches were established, the section would appoint the students, who would be able to serve full-time in these churches, as pastors. [60]

In 1990, the school graduated about fifty students with G.Th., the same year Hla Myint was appointed as the new principal and the school received the recognition and provision from the General Council. Then in 1994, the school was upgraded again to offer a four-year B.Th. program and fifteen students enrolled in the program that year. The name of the school was changed to Maranatha Bible College. In the same year, upon the completion of their supplementary courses, ten

[57]Ibid., 124.

[58]Khup Lian Pau, Former Superintendent of Kalay Section, interview by author, 7 September 2000, Yangon, Myanmar.

[59]Hla Myint, Principal of Maranatha Bible College, interview by author, 20 July 2000, Baguio City, Philippines.

[60]Khup Lian Pau, interview by author, 7 September 2000, Yangon, Myanmar.

students graduated with their B.Th. degrees. To this day, the college has graduated over 100 G.Th. students and 500 B.Th. students.[61]

Bethel Bible College

The Assemblies of God leaders in Tedim Section also saw the need of providing Pentecostal theological training for newly emerged leaders of the revival. By 1990, there were already about seventy Assemblies of God churches in Tedim Township and Ton Zang Township, but there were only two ministers who had formal theological training. The new ministers were also faced with the need of correcting the false teachings and practices in local churches. Therefore, in that year, the Tedim Section decided to open a Pentecostal Bible School on the premises of Bethel Assembly of God with Suak Za Go as its founding principal. The school first planned to offer a three-month course once a year, and to present G.Th. to the students, who have completed four years (four three-month courses). Upon the request of the students, the school was opened the whole year and the students were able to complete G.Th. in a short period of time. In 1992, the school was able to graduate seventeen students with G.Th. The purpose of the school was to provide the ministers with Pentecostal theological training. The focus was on Pentecostal distinctives. In order to provide the students with practical training, the school assigned the students to various ministries of local Assemblies of God churches in Tedim Township every weekend. Mission trips were also planned during school vacations.

In 1994, according to the need, the Tedim Section decided to upgrade the school to college level and to change the name of the school to Bethel Bible College. To this day, the school has graduated about 100 students with G.Th. or B.Th. In 1999, the school was recognized by the General Council. Now Bethel Bible College is under the supervision and responsibility of number 7 District Council and the local churches in the district support the school financially. Thuam Khan Thang, a D.Min. graduate from Oral Robert University, is serving as principal of the school.[62]

[61]Ibid.; and Hla Myint, interview by author, 14 January 2014, Yangon, Myanmar.

[62]Suak Za Go, General Treasurer of the General Council of the Assemblies of God of Myanmar, interview by author, 6 September 2000, Yangon, Myanmar.

Other Bible Schools

Myo Chit, the former General Superintendent, also has conducted the School of Evangelism at his church, Evangel Church, in Yangon since 1989. The school offers three- to six-month long Bible and practical Evangelism courses. Students sent from various district councils as well as other new ministers are trained in this school. Students are required not only to study in the classroom but also to go out and practically be involved in various forms of evangelism and ministry.

Number 1 District Council also opened its own short-term Bible school in Myitkyina, called Living Water Bible School, in 1981 through the leadership of Ngwa Ye Yaw, then the Secretary of the School Board of Evangel Bible Institute in Myitkyina. The school is intended

for those who are not qualified to attend Evangel Bible Institute, or who are not able to spend a long period of time to study. Also, there were those who urgently needed a short training for the work among Chinese Lisu people. The school is conducted in Lisu as well as in Myanmar. The program of the school was first designed in such a way that the students were required to take a three-month Bible course in every year for three years. Later, the school changed the program to the one-year Certificate of Theology (C.Th.) program. In 1995, the school became an extension program of Evangel Bible Institute in Myitkyina.[63]

Also, Number 2 District Council and Number 5 District Council have their own short-term Bible schools in Putao. These schools are intended for the ministers from remote and mountainous areas who are not able to study in Myitkyina. Accordingly, these schools are conducted in Rawang and Lisu respectively, and the students need to take a three-month Bible training course every year for three years.[64]

There are many other short-term Bible schools in various places such as Mindat, Haka, Tamu, etc. in Chin State as well as in other parts of the country. These Bible schools are conducted by local churches or by sections. Today there are numerous Assemblies of God Bible schools run by individual churches and ministers as well as by the General Council, district councils, or sectional councils all over the country that offer short-term Bible training, diploma programs, undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

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[63]Ngwa Ye Yaw, interview by author, 2 September 2000, Yangon, Myanmar.
[64]Ibid.

Now the Assemblies of God of Myanmar has grown to about 1200 congregations with more than 150,000 members. This growth highlights the important role that the Bible schools have played throughout the years in church planting.

Common Characteristics of these Assemblies of God Bible Schools

As we have seen, the Assemblies of God Bible schools in Myanmar came into being out of the pressing need of the church to provide God's people with the necessary theological and ministerial training so that they may be successful in their ministries and missions. Therefore, these Bible schools were not intended for academic excellence. Most of them were first opened as short-term Bible schools. In my opinion, another common characteristic of these schools is that their focus is implicitly or explicitly on Pentecostal indoctrination and missiological and ministerial training. Moreover, these schools have had a strong supportive relationship with local churches. The activities of the schools and the ministries of their graduates have a great impact on the growth and the ministries of the local churches. Now there are more Bible Schools operated by Assemblies of God churches springing up in the whole country. The General Council schools and these new schools are now aiming at offering a high quality higher theological education to the men and women of God chosen for His ministries.

Conclusion

The Assemblies of God leaders in Myanmar, national leaders and missionaries alike, have seen the importance and the need of providing theological education to new converts as well as to new ministers. The experience of the Assemblies of God churches in Myanmar has proved that apart from the empowering and the leading of the Holy Spirit, providing theological education to the ministers is important for the survival and growth of the church.

The Assemblies of God in Myanmar has actively been involved in theological education for ministers since its inception. However, for some reasons, advanced theological schools like Bible colleges were not established immediately in the beginning of the mission. In Myanmar, like in the West, the Pentecostal theological education system has evolved gradually from short-term Bible schools to advanced theological schools as time has passed. This pattern may be due to the fact that, as Menzies suggests, while the Pentecostals see the

need and the importance of theological education at all levels, they also have fear of the intellectualism, which had led the classical churches into spiritual darkness.[65] There are still a number of Assemblies of God ministers in Myanmar who are against higher theological education. However, they are only a few. Therefore, anti-intellectualism is no longer considered a problem in the Myanmar Assemblies of God.

Another reason, I suggest, is the lack of opportunities and resources. The Church in Myanmar has few theological books systematically and academically written in the native language(s). Theological books published in English outside the country are too expensive for Myanmar people. Moreover, Myanmar students are limited in the use of English. That is why many churches and denominations are reluctant to open high-level theological schools in Myanmar. Therefore, Myanmar ministers, who have received higher theological education must take responsibility to solve this problem. They need to write and publish theological books – at least translated works – so that the ministers of the Assemblies of God in Myanmar will be well equipped for their future ministries.

Nevertheless, the history of the development of the Assemblies of God Bible schools in Myanmar suggests that the leaders are aware that theological education is crucial for the survival and growth of the church and that one-time theological training may not be adequate for a minister. Therefore, it is the will of God that Pentecostals are to depend not only on their Pentecostal experience but also on formal theological training.

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[65]Menzies, Anointed to Serve, 141.

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Larry R. McQueen, *Joel and the Spirit: The Cry of a Prophetic Hermeneutic* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2009), paperback, xiv + 122 pp., ISBN: 9780981965123, US$ 12.95.

This book is Pentecostal in content and presentation. It is powerful. It is revolutionary. It is worth keeping a copy of *Joel and the Spirit: The Cry of a Prophetic Hermeneutic* in one's personal library. The perceptive work of Larry R. McQueen is a very handy exposition of the Spirit in Joel. The author considers selected portions of the New Testament with regards to their allusions to Joel's prophecy concerning the Spirit of God. Furthermore, he evaluates the Pentecostal understanding of the Spirit as prophesied by the prophet Joel. It is a clearly written, concise volume. Originally published by Sheffield Academic Press in 1995, McQueen's *Joel and the Spirit* was written for the Master of Theology thesis requirement at Columbia Theological Seminary. The publication of the thesis makes this significant work of McQueen available for a wide audience.

The first chapter serves as an introduction. Here, McQueen describes the issues in Pentecostal hermeneutics. He describes the current discussion of the role of the Pentecostal experience to the practice of biblical interpretation. He reviews the contributions of Cheryl Bridges Johns, Rick D. Moore, Roger Stronstad, Arden C. Autry, Timothy B. Cargal and Jackie D. Johns to Pentecostal hermeneutics (2-5). The author presents the context of his research within the tension of the modernist and the fundamentalist paradigms against that of the postmodern and the Pentecostal hermeneutics. It is important to understand his introduction first so the setting of his research can be appreciated by the reader. He also strongly argues for the literary unity and the post-exilic dating of Joel (6-11).

McQueen works his way through Joel as a book and at the same time shows consciousness of its prophetic genre in chapter two. The thesis that he is advancing in terms of this chapter called, "The themes of Joel and the Promise of the Spirit," is that the literary framework of the book is divided into three sections: "Lamentation" (1:1-2:17); "Salvation" (2:18, 32); and "Judgment" (3:1-21) (12-18). He points out that "lament," "salvation" and "judgment" are genres that Joel used and also expanded to accomplish the purposes of his oracles (18-22). Using these genres, the author argues that the themes of "The Day of Yahweh" and "Zion" are developed in Joel (23-31). In addition, he

expounds on the notion that the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit of God is Yahweh's response to the lament of his people (31-36).

In the next chapter, the author surveys the notion of the outpouring and reception of the Holy Spirit that is in accordance to the promise of the prophet Joel. This chapter deals with the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy in the New Testament. McQueen demonstrates how the prophecy of the coming of the Spirit has been appropriated in Luke-Acts. In particular, the second chapter of Acts uses Joel 2:28-32 as the explanation of the Pentecost event (37-49). At the same time, the author also offers his analysis of how the Apostle Paul alludes to Joel's prophecy, which reflects the eschatological tension that is associated with the Holy Spirit (50-58). Moreover, he also notes that John, Hebrews and the Petrine epistles echo Joel's themes (58-64). In other words, the idea of the Spirit's coming as highlighted by Joel is a major New Testament theme.

Chapter four expounds on spiritual insights about the way Pentecostals adopts the book of Joel in their faith and practice. The continuity of highlighting "lament," "salvation" and "judgment" as interpreted by Pentecostals is well illustrated. McQueen uses a song that became a favorite among Pentecostals to validate the popular level of appropriating Joel's prophecy (71). The substantial amount of footnotes that he uses in this chapter, utilizing both the older and more recent accepted Pentecostal publications as well as the research of contemporary Pentecostal scholars, shows the reflective nature of the Pentecostal people who believe in the promised Holy Spirit according to the prophet (69-102). It is noteworthy that McQueen brings a reminder of the Pentecostal understanding of "praying through" (70-72) and "tarrying" (72-73) as well as "groaning" (73-75) in connection with lament in Joel.

The concluding chapter is like an epilogue. It is descriptively titled, "The Book of Joel: Confessions of a Pentecostal Reader." The author admits that the inquiry he has done on Joel is "an intentional reflection on Pentecostal hermeneutics (104)." McQueen "approached this study as a classical Pentecostal with the intention of allowing [his] Pentecostal tradition and experience to impact [his] methodology and conclusions" (104). Hence, this concluding chapter has completed a circle and questions what influence the author's "Pentecostal experiential presuppositions had on the *initial* reading of the book of Joel" (104). He justifies the validity of "sectarian hermeneutic" and "the text-reader dialectic" (104-106). The text of Joel makes him "re-

evaluate" (106) his union with God, and he has opened up himself to "prophetic hermeneutic of the Spirit" (108) in his study of the prophet.

It is known that Pentecostals have been ridiculed as chaotic when speaking in tongues during church services. They have been criticized for bad hermeneutical practice in interpreting Holy Spirit passages in the Bible. They have been told that their pneumatology is poorly articulated because it has been dictated by experience. They have been associated with extreme emotionalism rather than correct understanding of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. Perhaps, these previous charges are true. However, Pentecostals have matured. Over one hundred years of existence has given them time to ponder their encounter with the Spirit of God, which they claim as fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. The work of McQueen is a good example of serious Pentecostal reflection about their experience of the Holy Spirit.

There is something valuable when reading an academic thesis such as *Joel and the Spirit* that brings "edification," "exhortation," and "comfort." Borrowing the preceding loaded words from the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:3 in the King James Version prompts the reviewer to pause, contemplate and apply what has been learned in reading McQueen's book. "The Cry of a Prophetic Hermeneutic" (the volume's subtitle) is really about the Holy Spirit in the Pentecostal encounter of the prophetic and is meant to be just what Paul declares: "But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort." Pentecostals have appropriated the promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days as prophesied by Joel as a source of "edification, and exhortation, and comfort."

This volume is not only written in an academic fashion, but it is also powerful in its testimonial features. It is a book that one can read again and again and get insightful ideas and food for thought every time it is read. McQueen brings many insightful and challenging ideas about the Pentecostal reading of Joel's prophecy. His book is also thought provoking, making the reviewer reflect on what Pentecostal spirituality is all about. It is a balanced demonstration of what Pentecostal scholarship offers to complement the Pentecostal experience. This title will not only benefit Pentecostals but also non-Pentecostals. This new edition published by CPT Press is a welcome reissue of a compact book that offers much towards a better understanding of the Pentecostal experience and hermeneutics.

R. G. dela Cruz

Martin William Mittelstadt, *Reading Luke-Acts in the Pentecostal Tradition* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010), paperback, xiv + 218 pp., ISBN: 9780981965178, US$ 14.95.

This volume is a first of its kind. Although Pentecostal scholarship has focused on the exploration of Luke-Acts, as expected due to these New Testament books' influence on the experience of the Holy Spirit, there is no title written on how Pentecostals have been involved in the investigation of Lukan writings. *Reading Luke-Acts in the Pentecostal Tradition* bridges this gap in Pentecostal academy and the study of Luke-Acts as a whole. The scope of Martin William Mittelstadt's work starts with Azusa Street and concludes with current Pentecostal contributions to the interpretation of Luke-Acts. While mainline Protestants have the proclivity to illuminate the writings of the New Testament through the lenses of the Apostle Paul, Classical Pentecostals view their encounter of the Spirit as biblically based on Luke-Acts. A full book should be devoted to how Pentecostals interpret their experience in relationship with the New Testament, especially the Acts of the Apostles.

Mittelstadt introduces the development and the trajectory of Pentecostal scholarship. The response of Pentecostals to James Dunn's *Baptism in the Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* is the start of serious Pentecostal academic reflection about their experience based on Luke-Acts (3-4). The pioneering studies of Gordon Fee, Roger Stronstad, Howard Ervin and James Shelton responded to the Evangelical critique of the Pentecostal distinctive doctrines (4). The author surveys the development and status of scholarship in Luke-Acts in the twentieth century (7-11). He also gives trails of Pentecostal theology with the notion that Luke-Acts will certainly play a significant part in any path that academic Pentecostals will pursue in their studies (11-16). The result of Mittelstadt's presentation of the information that he gathers, as well as his interpretation of this data, seems to be predictable and inevitable because of the Pentecostal movement's limited reliance on Luke-Acts for their experience of Spirit baptism.

Four chapters are devoted to the "History and Trajectory of Pentecostal Contributions to Luke-Acts Research." Mittelstadt uses the

first chapter to present the pre-Dunn's publication of *Baptism in the Spirit* (see 18-45). It covers Charles Parham and Azusa Street's interpretation of the Pentecostal experience down to the Pentecostal pioneers and apologists during the pre-1970 period. He further includes the "new issue" that gave birth to "Jesus Only" doctrine. The historicity of Luke-Acts was upheld by Pentecostal pioneers as well as the evidential tongues. The expositions of the pioneers on baptism in the Spirit are more for preaching and devotionals. The preservation of the Pentecostal doctrine of speaking in tongues as initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit continued to develop based on the study of the patterns in the Acts of the Apostles. The first, second and third generations of Pentecostals never compromised tongues as biblical evidence.

Chapter two deals with the Pentecostal scholars' interactions with James Dunn as they get involved in serious historical-critical scholarship. The Dunn factor is unavoidable. This is clearly notable as Mittelstadt evaluates the responses of Fee, Stronstad, Ervin, Shelton, Menzies and Turner to Dunn and the academic status of the research in Luke-Acts (49-63). The author also views that there are three persistent questions about the Pentecostal experience and scholarly endeavor. The first is cessationism of tongues and the miraculous (64-68). The second is the lasting justification of the experience of Spirit baptism (68-77). And third is the legitimate methodology of interpreting the Pentecostal experience in the Bible (77-79). These issues debated within the context of Evangelicalism and the challenges brought by Dunn will continue to get attention among Pentecostal thinkers. However, Mittelstadt correctly asserts that current "new paradigms" and "postmodern shift" open up a methodological fit for them (80).

Mittelstadt brings to the front Pentecostal scholarship's attention to literary criticism in the study of Luke-Acts in the following chapter (see 81-113). In other words, he sees how Pentecostal thinkers are now liberated from historical-critical methodology of Evangelicals. The academic quest of Pentecostals is now going into new territory as they are now "out of the shadows" of the Evangelical emphasis on the historicity of the Bible. The use of narratology is becoming extensive among Pentecostal scholars. The use of Luke-Acts in reading the missions endeavor of Pentecostals receives help from a narrative approach to the Bible. Healing and exorcism, women in ministry, spiritual development and even oneness theology are being influenced

by literary studies and narrative criticism. The belief that Acts is a normative text and the basis of a biblical paradigm suited the Pentecostal pursuit of using a literary approach to articulate their faith and experience. The conversation between science and religion is opened up by the narrative theology that Pentecostal thinkers are now employing.

The fourth chapter itemizes the other academic interests of Pentecostals. They are consistent in using Luke-Acts in their study. Because the Pentecostal experience is exclusively anchored in the Lukan writings, Pentecostals cannot depart from what Luke and Acts have to say to the issues of social justice and sound ethics, making peace and understanding suffering, persecution and ecumenism, as well as interreligious dialogue and the postmodern age in a global context (see 115-149). Pentecostals have not shown any hesitancy in stretching the boundaries of doctrine and practice. Through their innovations and insights, Pentecostal thinkers bring with them new answers to old questions of life that are once again ringing in a postmodern worldwide milieu. The capability of Pentecostal faith and practice to survive in a different context in the contemporary setting is due to the adaptability and flexibility of understanding what the Holy Spirit is doing. The Spirit of God can go wherever he wills as the wind blows wherever it wills.

The last section of the volume describes the current status of research in Luke-Acts (see 150 ff). Without a doubt, Pentecostals will continue to contribute to the study of the Lukan writings. Pentecostal scholarship holds a lot of promise in the academic pursuit of Luke-Acts. There are openings for Pentecostals to do research on healing and the miraculous in the context of social transformation. The identity of Pentecostals within the framework of global Christianity is becoming its charismatic face (152). Other matters, such as socio-economic issues and race-immigration displacements, could also be addressed using the Luke-Acts narrative. World politics and interreligious dialogue can also receive comments from Pentecostal thinkers using the lenses of Luke-Acts. In other words, there ~~is~~ are so many new possibilities for Pentecostal studies in the global context of the world today.

Mittelstadt also furnishes an epilogue, "A Not So Final Word," emphasizing the open-ended necessity of dialogue where Pentecostals participate. He believes that "Meanings born in dialogue should never

be finalized, that is, ended once for all" (163). He also provides an appendix for useful commentaries and pastoral tools for Pentecostals (165-169). His bibliography is extensive, and the indices are helpful to easily navigate the book to locate topics or passages that are of interest to the reader. In general, this volume meets the expectation of the reviewer. It provides a comprehensive coverage of the Pentecostal scholarship in Luke-Acts. Its usefulness as a tool is exceptional.

R. G. dela Cruz

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