BEYOND LITERALISM AND LIBERALISM: UNDERSTANDING THE
GRAMMAR OF GENDERED LANGUAGE ABOUT GOD

Spencer M. Boersma
Acadia Divinity College, Wolfville, NS, Canada

A typical fault line in the debates between liberals and conservatives is the question of whether God can be referred to as "Mother." However, as this essay will endeavor to demonstrate, the binary of conservative versus liberal, and their accompanying methodological rules of either an appeal to revelation or appeal to experiential liberation, is problematic and in many ways a false dichotomy. Words must be understood by the contours of grammar that render them intelligible, where reference and function have intertwined capacities to offer meaning. In looking at several approaches (or "rules of grammar") of Christian thinkers who have commented on the structure of Christian discourse about God (following rules such as all discourse about God must be apophatic, analogical, narrative-driven, incarnation, trinitarian, etc.), a constructive convergence arises that challenges problematic understandings of both revelation and liberation.

Both approaches require a deeper "grammar." The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein noted that propositional statements find their fuller meanings in their forms of life.[1] Whether the same word refers to one thing or another is determined by the context of usage. In this regard, usage is often neglected in theological statements. When someone believes "in Jesus," which is undoubtedly the proper name of the second member of the Trinity, there has to be some reference to what that means in the speaker's actions in order to access the validity of their beliefs about "Jesus" and whether this is indeed the "Jesus" of the Christian Gospels. Surely, what a Mormon and a Roman

---

1. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 111–12, 373.

Catholic mean when they affirm that they believe "in Jesus" is quite different even though they use to the same name. George Lindbeck pointed out that for a crusader who cried out "Christ is Lord" before killing innocent Muslims, "Christ" has a highly problematic meaning, as indicated by the form of life.[2] If Christian faith is like a language, where the context of usage is governed by the rules of grammar (such as when to use "a" or "an"), then Christian language is similarly intelligible because of the implicit grammars that structure it. What that structure is, implicit in speech, can be determined explicitly in order to hone communication. Thus, for theology to observe grammar as this essay will be doing, means several things for usage. When one examines some of the central ways Christians have structured discourse about God, one can see the means by which the two sides in this debate display perhaps not a resolution but at the least a strong convergence. In this regard, the concern for revelational realism (that is, that God reveals God's very self in word and historical events, especially in the life of Jesus Christ) and the concern for pragmatic liberation are not at loggerheads, but rather are complementary and go hand in hand.

So, what exactly is a name, grammatically speaking? There is no straightforward answer. While there are "proper names" like "Jesus" or "Yahweh," there are other categories of words that name God in a secondary sense: general words "God" or "El," titles like "El Shaddai" or "Christ," qualities such as "being" or "goodness," and still others that do not fit neatly into any category like Jesus being called "Immanuel." Are names arbitrary (or merely aesthetic as in today's culture) or are they irreducibly particular (and thus unreplaceable)? Or are names in the biblical narrative indicative of a certain denotation?[3] It seems that biblical names carried an important denotative function. Even a proper name like "Jesus" (which is of course not culturally accurate as it is actually "Yeshua") carried the connotation of being a Joshua-like savior figure for Israel. What this essay demonstrates is that there are multiple pathways through which God is named,

2.   Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 64.
3.   Grenz, *The Named God*, 271–80.

though they do not replace the proper names Yahweh and Jesus, which aid in understanding masculine and father language as well as permit feminine and mother language. These pathways are holistically understood through the various grammars that offer deeper meaning to the divine identity.

The Current Debate: The Dichotomy Between the Rules of Revelation and Liberation

The two sides, which will be dubbed "conservative" and "feminist" for the purposes of this essay,[4] reveal a polarization in their considerations of how and why Christians can speak of God. In this regard, conservatives tend to assert the rule of Scripture while feminists assert the rule of liberating action.

Conservatives have typically asserted that God is "Father" and use the pronoun "he" because this is the language of Scripture. God in the Old Testament is most often referred to as "he" and Jesus, who is male and seen as a normative example, uses "Father" in addressing the first member of the Trinity. Thus, "Father" is the name of the first member of the Trinity and not merely a title or one metaphor among others. This argument, quite simple in form, is utilized by dozens of scholars.[5] In which, the baptismal language of the "name" of the "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19), is essential to the identification of God. To attempt to supplant the baptismal formula or pray the

---

4.   There is some reluctance in using these labels, as it will be shown that those that advocate usage of "Mother" can lay claim to the classical tradition of Christianity, and, on the other hand, can be committed to the classical tenants of Christianity which do not exclude and oppress women. It should be admitted that often feminist theologians then have been labelled "feminist" for pointing out the failure of many to see this, and these thinkers are then labelled "feminist theologians" where their critics are just "theologians." Thus, this essay from its opening terms is aware of how language and labels can function to marginalize some in a debate through the control of terms. No marginalization or dismissal is intended with either usage here.

5.   Some examples are as follows: Packer, *Knowing God*, 183; Geffe, "'Father' as the Proper Name of God," 44; Bloesch, *Battle for the Trinity*; Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:259–64; Kimel, *Speaking the Christian God*; Cooper, *Our Father in Heaven*; Biggs, "Gender and God-Talk," 15–25.

"Our Mother" instead of the "Our Father" (Matt 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4) is tantamount to undermining what God has revealed.

However, there is a diversity of perspectives within this view. Most would not argue that God is indeed truly male, but rather gendered pronouns are preferable to the depersonalized "it." Most would understand God as Father by revelation, but of course, would note that God is no created thing and is not male in a literal sense, reduced to a creature. Again, the implicit rule of this position might be stated as the language of the Bible legitimates the language that is permissible. Therefore, since Jesus did not refer to the first member of the Trinity as "Mother," the Church today is not allowed to say this either.[6] According to this grammar, God is named by revelation.

There are, of course, practical implications bound up with this view. This discussion can be tied to women in leadership. Particularly in Catholic theology, a female priest cannot represent Christ (who is male) the way a male is able to do.[7] Or in some conservative Protestant theology, a woman cannot lead (whether in a church, home, or society—there is a spectrum of what is allowable), because this forsakes a headship God has installed. Male headship coincides with divine headship.[8] There are plenty, however, who are convinced egalitarians, who do not see father language bound up with restricting women in leadership.[9]

Yet, many feminists worry that the use of male imagery alienates women and makes patriarchy more entrenched. Mary Daly famously said that if "God is male, then the male is god."[10]

---

6.   Some essays that state that God is beyond gender, but that God cannot be referred to as Mother, seem to display a characteristic failure of integration of the biblical grammar. For an example see McGregor-Wright, "God, Metaphor, and Gender," 287–301. All the elements are present to affirm God as Mother, but the essay stops short. For many egalitarians in more conservative denominations or theological settings, resting at this position is a kind of theological safe place to say, "I am for equality of women, sure, but I am not liberal like those that insist God is Mother."

7.   See "Declaration *Inter Insigniores*," 5.

8.   See Grudem and Piper, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.

9.   A good example is Bloesch, *Is the Bible Sexist*.

10.   Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 18.

Accordingly, male imagery is bound up with patriarchy and promotes the idea that God is closer to men. Thus, men are much more comfortable asserting authority over women and delegitimizing female experience in various forms, whether subtlety or in overtly abusive ways. Therefore, that which oppresses, namely women, must be negated and supplanted. This axiom has led to revisions to traditional language about God in order to prioritize feminine language as a counter against patriarchal language (as well as hierarchical images like "king" negated for ones like "friend").[11] Such a move is possible by an appeal to all language about God being metaphorical, as God is radically transcendent. Thus, for McFague, all images have their place, but certain ones like "king" or "father," that have held a dominant hegemony in Christianity, should be de-prioritized in the current climate to achieve pragmatic ends, namely that of liberation. One can see in this position a metaphorical approach that uses pragmatic concerns of liberation as its rule for how to speak of God: "The truth of theological formulation lies in its effects."[12]

Extremes on either side are apparent. The primary conservative weakness is that its strict appeal to the Bible results in literalism, which often seeks to uphold the "letter" so tightly it ironically misses the "spirit." The best aspect of this position asserts that the Bible prioritizes "he" and "Father" because this is the content of revelation. The notion that God reveals God's self is certainly fundamental to Christian faith. However, characteristic of literalism, there is often an emphasis on one detail that neglects others. A young earth creationist will insist that Gen 1 is a concrete, realistic narrative but has to ignore details in the text that describe a flat, domed universe. Similarly, literalization of God as father often downplays or ignores how God uses motherly language along with fatherly language in the Old Testament, which will be shown shortly. Literalism, ironically, misses a lot of what the Bible says and how it says it. A deeper analysis of the contents and grammar of scriptural speaking is needed.

---

11. McFague, *Models of God*, 165.
12. Carr, *Transforming Grace*, 109.

On the other side, there is a persistent tendency to downplay the authority of the Bible and realistic accounts of revelation. The notion that Scripture is rife with male language for God warrants, in this estimate, a sort of correcting or bypassing of it, seeing the Bible not as revelation or in any realistic sense as the Word of God.[13] Rosemary Radford Ruether states that her interpretive principle regards only those aspects of the biblical text that are useful to women's liberation to be authoritative, whereas the rest is to be "set aside and rejected."[14] Without a definite claim to revelation, however, metaphorical language has the potential to slip into projection of the human onto God, as Feuerbach accused theists of doing. Why one image is to be prioritized over another can potentially come down to one person's vision of liberation over another. The fact that someone like Jordan Peterson's highly hierarchical and male-dominant understandings of God are seen as appealing to many illustrates that liberation without realism of revelation can end up being perspectival and preferential and is at risk of devolving into Nietzschean self-assertion rather than the more counter-intuitive task of self-renunciation, compassion, and solidarity. This is, ironically, not practical. There are lots of forms of "liberal" theology today, some quite stimulating and self-consciously biblical. However, there are also unproductive forms that seek to undermine (or at the very least fail to uphold or bypass) a robust sense of the place of revelation and Scripture, imposing what seem to be concerns foreign to the biblical narrative upon it. In this regard, some approaches to God as "Mother" are this kind of liberalism.

While the primary concern of Christian feminism is to uphold the dignity of women as bearers of God's image, and in this regard, all Christians should be broadly feminist, there are expressions that are not concerned with being authentic to Christian faith or the kind of characteristic descriptions the Christian

13.   See Schneiders, "The Bible and Feminism," 38–40. She argues for a "metaphorical" account of the Bible as the Word of God as central to feminist biblical interpretation in general.

14.   Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 28.

community creates of itself and its narratives.[15] However, it should also be noted that some theological institutions and communities have made decisions that exclude women's voices or viable criticisms of the community's convictions. In this regard, some feminist criticism asserts that these exclusions are inherent to the structure of Christian discourse, and thus, in doing so, ironically concede their own marginalization as inherent to that discourse. Mary Daly notably left Christianity and deemed it inherently patriarchal.[16] This is not rhetorically effective, especially if it is not true. Thus, the following grammars, derived from the structures of the language of Scripture, will hopefully clarify the discourses of gendered language about God.

Ineffability and Negation

The first approach can be called "apophatic" (which means "negation"). The rule might be stated as follows: all discourse about God must recognize that God is transcendent and ineffable, and therefore, names and other language must be negated to prevent misconception.

Conservatives and feminists appeal to these schemes in two different ways. Conservatives use the apophatic approach to assert that God is beyond gender, but nevertheless, through realistic revelation God is exclusively male. The irony is that this language maintains that God is not gendered, while asserting that "he" cannot be anything other than the male gender. This is the impression of the Southern Baptist Convention's resolution in 1992: "God is beyond any human gender . . . [but] has uniquely and explicitly revealed himself to us as Father."[17] Meanwhile, some feminists have used ineffability to emphasize the radical transcendence of God above all language. The fusing of

---

15. This, admittedly, will look very different depending on the ecclesial community in question. This discussion will look very different in Canadian Baptist churches, where neither the literalism of biblical inerrancy nor motions against women in ministry have succeeded, as opposed to the Southern Baptist Convention.

16. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 140.

17. "Resolution on God the Father."

reference to this kind of exclusivity is viewed as idolatrous. However, some within this position seem to indicate that any revealed realism is also problematic, leaving language about God potentially agnostic.[18]

To clarify this rule, it was first and still perhaps best developed by the figure named Dionysius the Areopagite (named after the character from Acts 17:34, and often confused with his namesake). This writer from the late fifth to early sixth century was the first to devise a mystical approach of contemplating God. If God is truly ineffable and incomparable,[19] one implication of the disclosure of God's name to Moses, "I Am who I Am" (Exod 3:14), is that all language for God is in some way inadequate. God names God's self as unnameable.[20] Even the divine names for God must be negated to aid the believer in truly understanding how much higher God is than human thinking. Thus, Dionysius contemplates the words of Scripture, which he surely regards as revelation, and understands the deep grammar of this language. He sees God being named in transcendentals such as goodness, being, life, beauty, etc., which is important since God's names are not merely proper names. For each name, he is constantly aware of the fact that God is always so much more than any one biblical description. When God is described, an apophatic approach seeks to contemplate how God is also "not" that in order to respect God's ineffability. Some examples from his writings are instructive. For instance, he states that God is being. However, he argues that God is "not existent" or not "being," as God's being is simply beyond all existence as humans know it.[21] What is more interesting is that Dionysius will at times use opposing language to aid in negation. Unlike the later metaphysical tradition, he holds that God is both "being" and "becoming," "eternal" and "momentary," "past" and "future."[22]

---

18.   McFague, *Models of God*, 35. She also notably writes that religious language applies "only to our existence, not God's" (39).

19.   One should note that this is also the starting point for some feminists. See Johnson, *She Who Is*, 105.

20.   Dionysius, *On the Divine Names*, 1:1.

21.   Dionysius, *On the Divine Names*, 1:1.

22.   Dionysius, *On the Divine Names*, 5:3.

In doing so, he seeks to demonstrate that God is also beyond all of these. God's light is so beyond, it appears as "darkness";[23] God's word speaks as silence, etc. God is even conceived to be beyond every negation as well.

The names of the Trinity are "titles" for Dionysius. They are irreducible in that they point to the unity within the diversity of the activities of the ineffable God.[24] Sadly, Dionysius's treatment on divine symbols for God is lost (one of the great tragedies of theological history), and the mentions of other conceptual names of God neglect awareness of feminine imagery.[25] However, to extrapolate, one could argue that it is fully consistent with Dionysius's approach to uphold both that God is Father, and beyond fatherliness, and to negate this, he might use, "Mother" (not that male-female is equivalent to the other binaries discussed).

Therefore, if God is ineffable, it is important to establish that language for God should be negated and it can often be negated with opposite language. Dionysius does not deny realistic revelation, but rather sees its deeper grammar in which any name for God must be negated. Thus, one of the earliest ways of structuring Christian discourse reveals a deep congruence with both ways of referring to God.

Analogy and Metaphor

The second classic way Christian language has been organized is the way of analogy (comparisons using "like" or "as" to communicate meaning based on a corresponding partial similarity) and metaphor (the creative application of similarity of two dissimilar things to communicate an abstract quality that the other has concretely).[26] God is the being of all beings, all that which is good

---

23.   Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, 1:1.
24.   Dionysius, *On the Divine Names*, 2:3.
25.   Dionysius, *On the Divine Names*, 1:6; 1:8.
26.   This essay uses basic definitions of metaphor, but for more in-depth treatments, see Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, as well as Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*.

in existence can be used analogically to describe what God is like, and in so far as God is dissimilar from existence, creation can still nevertheless be employed to describe God's qualities metaphorically.

Analogy and metaphor are employed differently by conservatives and feminists. Conservatives, such as Colin Gunton, grant metaphorical language and analogy, but do so from a basis of underlying realism concerning historical revelation.[27] When it relates to the divine name, it is, nevertheless, not metaphorical. The possibility of referring to God as Mother, even metaphorically, or having feminine qualities and body parts, has been routinely critiqued as edging on paganism, polytheism, and pantheism. For instance, Elizabeth Achtemeier argues that feminine language cannot be used because it is prone to paganism, undermining God's transcendence.[28] Wolfhart Pannenberg argues that sexual differentiation in God would mean polytheism.[29] Meanwhile, feminists, such as Sallie McFague, argue that religious language is entirely metaphorical,[30] emphasizing that even the divine name is metaphorical to the point that it is a human construction that humans can preferentially change.[31] Thus, expositing the language of Scripture according to this rule will add clarity in how metaphors can be realistic and offer liberty of usage without being imposed constructs.

These rules were supremely developed by Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas himself was deeply indebted to Dionysius (assuming him incorrectly to be the writer from Acts). Similarly, Aquinas held that God was ineffable, but also noted that if God is the "I Am," then God is perfect being, "the One Who Is."[32] God's being is what holds all being together. God's goodness is the

27. Gunton, "Proteus and Procrustes," 65–80. Gunton offers in many ways an agreeable critique to McFague, but goes too far in insisting that everyone who seeks to permit mother language denies realistic revelation the way she does.

28. Achtemeier, "Exchanging God for 'No Gods,'" 8.

29. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:261.

30. McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 99, 134.

31. McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 15–16.

32. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1:22:10.

goodness of all beings, who are essentially good as created things despite displaying characteristic privations of goodness from the fall. This means that any goodness in nature is analogous to God's goodness.[33] If something is, for instance, beautiful, it is such because this beauty is in some way like God's beauty as it participates and finds its being in God. Yet, since God is beyond all beings, the analogical way incorporates Dionysius's negative way: God is like the goodness of created beings, but not equated with them.[34]

This analogical axiom is made explicit in passages like Isa 66:13a, "As a mother comforts her child, I will comfort you."[35] Additionally, if God is exclusively like a "he" or "father" and simply can never be like a "she" or "mother," this would seem to indicate a domain where God is absent, which does not seem to be in keeping with how both male and female are in the divine "image" (Gen 1:26–27).[36] One is given the distinct impression that fatherliness as a quality participates in God's being and goodness in a higher degree than motherliness.

Aquinas grants a link between analogy and metaphor.[37] Scripture affirms that God is metaphorically a rock, lion, wind, fire, etc. God is strong and dependable like a rock, regal and untamed like a lion, invisible like wind, etc. God takes on metaphorical titles like king, shepherd, warrior, etc. and these communicate their own positive qualities. All of these metaphors are

---

33. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1:34:1.

34. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1:14:2.

35. This is a part of a peculiar passage (Isa 66:10–13) where Jerusalem is personified as a woman nursing Israel, whom God has restored, but then God embodies this analogy such that God seems to participate in the references to "her."

36. McFague, *Models of God*, 98. Also see Jewett, *God, Creation, and Revelation*, 323–25.

37. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1:30:2: "Since it is possible to find in God every perfection of creatures, but in another and more eminent way, whatever names unqualifiedly designate a perfection without effect are predicated of God and of other things: for example, goodness, wisdom, being, and the like. But when any name expresses such perfections along with a mode that is proper to a creature, it can be said of God only according to likeness and metaphor."

appropriate as their concrete goodness as created things point in different ways to how God is uniquely good.[38] This fittingness even makes possible motherly metaphors from the animal kingdom: whether it is a bird or eagle caring for its young (Ps 91:4) or a mother bear communicating God's fierceness in judgment (Hos 13:8).[39]

Metaphorical description is the grammar that stands behind many passages that employ motherly and feminine language. God describes God's self to Moses metaphorically as the mother and nurse of Israel, birthing and nursing Israel: "Did I conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child, to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors?'" (Num 11:12). Similarly, titles of God like *El Shaddai*, God Almighty, where *shaddai* may be derivative from *shadu,* meaning "breasts," suggests God's power over creation is like human fertility.[40] Also, Deuteronomy uses motherly and rock metaphors to warn, "You have forgotten the rock who bore you and put out of mind the God who gave you birth" (Deut 32:18). Job 38:8–9, 28–29, Jer 31:20, and Isa 46:3–4 all describe God as having borne Israel. This language is taken up in the description of the Trinity in the eleventh council of Toledo in 675 CE, which describes the Son as begotten from the "womb of the father." Aquinas does not draw from this implication when he discusses

38.   Aquinas (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1:31:2) gives an example in the next section after discussing metaphor where a stone is not a proper name of God the way wisdom is (although he oddly neglects the scriptures that do refer to God as a rock here), nevertheless, a stone "imitates God as its cause in being and goodness."

39.   There are other uses of feminine language that employs cultural language that refers to typically female roles. God is portrayed as a midwife attending a birth in Pss 22:9–10, 71:6, and Isa 66:8–9. Paralleling God as shepherd (male) in the parables, God and his kingdom are described as being like a woman working leaven into bread (Luke 13:21) and a woman seeking a lost coin (Luke 15:8–10), both chores of Galilean peasant women. Jesus identifies God in these parables with women.

40.   See Gen 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25. Several of these coincide with themes of fertility, thus corroborating the connotation. See Biale, "The God with Breasts," 240–56. Also see, Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine*.

the Trinity, but other writers do. Clement of Alexandria writes concerning the Son, "The Word is everything to his little ones, both father and mother and tutor and nurse." [41] He goes on and speaks of the breasts of the Father, Son, and Spirit that nourish the church.[42] Similarly, John Chrystostom hails God as, "Thou art my Father, thou art my Mother, thou my Brother, thou art Friend, thou art Servant, thou art House-keeper; thou art the All, and the All is in thee; thou art Being, and there is nothing that is, except thou."[43]

These descriptions should show that the criticism of motherly and feminine language by conservative proponents cannot be maintained. The accusations of connection to paganism and polytheism are stunningly neglectful of the above passages, which make it abundantly clear that female anatomy and motherly descriptions do not by necessity imply this connection. The fact that they are criticized as such could be indicative of deep-seated unconscious prejudice, or in turn fuel it.

In the analogical and metaphorical grammar of referring to God, to deny motherly language to God is to deny both the created goodness of motherliness and the appropriate capacity for creaturely motherliness to render God's redemptive love, as Scripture and certain writers in the Christian tradition have shown. Whether or not "Mother" is a proper name for the first member of the Trinity is still to be discussed, but as a metaphorical and analogical means of referring to God, classic Christian discourse more than allows this, given the richness of images and titles used.

41.   Clement of Alexandria, *Christ the Educator*, 68.

42.   Clement of Alexandria describes God the Father at length as the Mother who nurses God's children: " . . . little ones who seek the Word, the craved for milk is given from the Father's breasts of love for man." *Christ the Educator*, 43. Similarly, Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, 179–80, "For from those divine breasts where it seems God is always sustaining the soul there flows streams of milk bringing comfort to all people." See also Haddad, "Feminine God Language."

43.   Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, 447.

Narrative

The third approach is a narrative approach. This rule would state that God is described through the events in Israel's history that offer definition to God's essential character.

Again, there is a strange dichotomy here. For conservatives, there is a strong appeal to realistic revelation. There is often a neglect, as previously shown, of feminine imagery in favor of prioritizing the father language in narratives and understanding it as being about the gender of God's agency (or that the agency of God can only be communicated with one particular gender). Meanwhile, feminist often deny the historicity of revelation and even use the description "fiction"[44] with an affirmation of the existence of feminine imagery.

As Ricoeur argues, "The naming of God is thus first of all a narrative naming. The theology of tradition names God in accord with a historical drama that recounts itself as a narrative of liberation . . . It is these events that name God."[45] The analogical and metaphorical ways are susceptible to projection and confusion that make them dependent on being understood through God's acts in history as concrete descriptors for Israel's worship.[46] Here, the revelation of God as "I am who I am," cannot be forgotten. As Ricoeur writes, "the revelation of the name is the dissolution of all anthropomorphisms, of all figures and figurations, including that of the father. The name against the idol."[47] God is a rock, but God is not found in idols. God is a whirlwind, but when Jesus rebukes the storm, presumably he is not rebuking his own presence. Aquinas is more than aware of these kinds of confusions, and so, his own way of analogically understanding God moves from affirmation and negation to what he calls the way of eminence, in which a purer way of referring is possible.[48] An isolated metaphor for God must be understood within the

---

44. McFague, *Models of God*, xi, "theology is mostly fiction."
45. Ricoeur, "Naming God," 225.
46. See Wright, *God who Acts*.
47. Ricoeur, "Fatherhood," 486.
48. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1:30.4. See Long, *Speaking of God*, 149–215, for an account of these uses of language in Aquinas.

narrative patterns of God's actions. Coinciding with the preceding rule, what this shows is that the characteristic behavior of God is described with a diversity of descriptions and that these descriptions, whether fatherly or motherly, are not referring to God's gender but rather to God's goodness and love.

The title "Father" is given concrete description in the narratives of Israel. This is essential to how God communicates to ancient patriarchal culture that worshiped the "father of the gods" and whose families were ruled by a patriarch. Because God is powerful and because men were powerful in the ancient culture, one sees the analogical reference of God as Father. Feminists are correct to criticize this in that women did have a low worth in this culture which factors into this prioritization, but the biblical narrative shows a characteristic surmounting of patriarchy in and through this accommodation.[49] God was like these supreme gods in authority and God was like a father: creating, providing, protecting, promising, blessing, etc. However, this becomes a pathway of saying that when one looks at the narrative actions of God used to define God's self, God is much more than these. There is both a metaphorical employment and narrative subversion similar to Aquinas's affirmation and negation. God was not merely the central god of the ancient pantheon, but rather, called Abraham out of this belief, out of his father's household, and into a new reality of God's loving care, one then surmounts the regionalization of deity or the brutality of child sacrifice, etc. Similarly, God's fatherliness is central to God delivering his "firstborn" Israel out of Egypt (Exod 4:23). As this Father God is the God that made promises to the fathers of Israel, so also, God delivers his oppressed children, protecting them and giving them a new inheritance (Exod 6:6–8). Thus, the fatherly quality of God counters oppression and reiterates that God is unlike any other. There are moments then that surmount patriarchy as fatherly metaphors were used to speak of God's care in light of Israel's waywardness, and so, the coldness of an unloving

---

49. For a good analysis of how the Bible has been both repressive as well as the means of redemption, and how to understand these in interpretation, see Webb, *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals*.

patriarch is transformed into a symbol of God's incomparable love: the father that never stops loving his children, unlike any other father. Isaiah invokes father language as a means of mercy: "Yet, O Lord, you are our father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be angry beyond measure, O Lord; do not remember our sins forever" (Isa 64:7–9).[50] Similarly, Jeremiah sees God's fatherliness as incomparable love in the midst of Israel's rebellion: "They will come with weeping; they will pray as I bring them back. I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel's father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son" (Jer 31:9; cf. Jer 3:19). Hosea identifies God as a lover, whose wife cheated on him, but then the metaphor shifts seamlessly into father language and into a moment of tenderness:

> When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son . . . It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them . . . How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? . . . My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I devastate Ephraim again. For I am God, and not a man—the Holy One among you. I will not come against their cities (Hos 11:1, 3–4, 8–9).

But it cannot be neglected that while fatherly language is prioritized, in a time when there were many cold, unloving patriarchs, to indeed counter patriarchy, there is also an employment of motherly metaphors that is aware that this motherly language also does not fully grasp the narratives of God's faithful love.

---

50.   It should be noted that the writer also uses the relation of father to lament and accuse God of hardening the hearts of Israel in a bizarre but powerfully relational moment in Scripture: "Where are your zeal and your might? Your tenderness and compassion are withheld from us. But you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; you, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name. Why, O Lord, do you make us wander from your ways and harden our hearts, so we do not revere you? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes that are your inheritance" (Isa 63:15–17).

Isaiah 49:15 says, "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!" (notice the apophatic approach implicitly at work in motherly language as well). God loves like a mother, but even then, is more loving than that. These descriptions also resist a simple bifurcation of fatherly qualities as power and wrath where motherly is tender and compassionate. Isaiah uses mother metaphors to communicate wrath, the wrath of a woman in labor:

> But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant . . . I will lay waste the mountains and hills and dry up all their vegetation . . . I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them (Isa 42:14–16).

Thus, to reiterate, it seems that both sets of language are employed, not to make a statement of God's gender but to richly describe the incomparable love God has for Israel.

Robert Hamerton-Kelly comments on this dynamic,

> Among the prophets, God is called father directly, in order to emphasize his care for his people, as a foil to their sin—sin as an expression of ingratitude. Throughout the prophetic stage, whether the symbolization is direct or indirect, explicit or implied, there is a tendency to move back and forth between 'father' and 'mother' imagery. The symbol described as that of a 'parent,' with a preponderance of the 'father' element . . . Fatherliness (and motherly language) becomes less about the social order of power and more about 'a symbol of free relationship and divine kindness.'[51]

The central confession of Israel was based on God's forgiveness after the idolatry of the golden calf where Moses beholds God's identity as "the Lord" and therefore as a "compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Exod 34:6–7). As Brueggemann notes, this "credo of adjectives" runs through the whole Old Testament.[52] This suggests

---

51.   Hamerton-Kelly, *God the Father*, 51.
52.   See Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 213–28.

that fundamental to the divine essence is not gender, but agapeic love, the former employed to illustrate the latter. For this reason, Jürgen Moltmann suggests language such as "God our motherly Father and fatherly Mother."[53] Thus, the grammar of narrative adds further concrete description to gendered language, showing the legitimacy of analogical and metaphorical language but also revealing the incomparable love of God and coinciding with the apophatic, as revealed in the acts of God and events of history.

Incarnation

The fourth approach, which is perhaps a cluster of connected approaches, might be called Christocentric. Discourse about God must be in conformity with the incarnation, cross, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It explores how revelation in Scripture finds its apex and center in Jesus Christ. Coinciding with the apophatic grammar, God is ineffable, yet can paradoxically be revealed in the finite. God reveals God's self in creation and history. Thus, the *Logos* of creation, through whom "all things were made" (John 1:3), reinforces the analogical way of referring. Coinciding with the narrative pattern, the male identity and language of Jesus is not a reification of God's gender so much as an illustration of God's love and thus actually serves to subvert patriarchy.

In conservative and feminist theologies, misappropriations and misunderstandings occur over the nature of Jesus. Some conservatives see the maleness of Jesus as insurmountable in these discussions. Thus Ray Anderson writes, "One can call God 'Mother' by switching metaphors but one cannot make Jesus into a female."[54] Some then have used this to overtly legitimate patriarchy by claiming that Jesus is male because maleness is required to have the authority to teach and govern.[55]

---

53.   Moltmann, "The Fatherly Mother," 51–56.
54.   Anderson, "The Incarnation of God," 288. One should note that Anderson does permit "mother" metaphors, as the above quotation shows, but these are of a different sort to the language of Jesus's maleness and therefore God's Fatherliness.
55.   For a popular but truly reprehensible example, see Matthis, "Why Jesus Was Not A Woman."

In some feminist theology, there is an objection to Jesus's maleness as incapable of redeeming women. Ruether writes,

> Today a Christology which elevates Jesus's maleness to ontologically necessary significance suggests that Jesus's humanity does not represent women at all. Incarnation does not include women, therefore women cannot be redeemed. That is to say, if women cannot represent Christ, then Christ does not represent women.[56]

She continues on to say that the particularly of Jesus's humanity is problematic, "Jesus's maleness as essential to his ongoing representation not only is not compatible but is contradictory to the essence of his message as good news to the marginalized *qua* women."[57] Others seek to bypass classical Christology. Sallie McFague has stated, "I have not found it possible as a contemporary Christian to support an incarnational Christology or a canonical Scripture; nevertheless, I have found it possible to support a 'parabolic' Christology and Scripture as the Christian classic."[58] Scripture is not so much an authority so much as a beginning point and holding to Christ as merely a "parable" suggests an inability to incorporate historicity with Jesus's identity. Therefore, "Christ" is a linguistic and metaphorical phenomenon, not a historical, realistic one.[59] But if the historical particularity of Jesus is upheld, the question must be addressed on those terms: How can a male savior show God's presence to women? Why did Jesus not come as a woman or as non-gendered?

Here, the incarnational must be understood through the narrative of Jesus's life. The fact that his teaching elevated the dignity of women cannot be overlooked,[60] and thus, his reference to God

---

56. Ruether, "The Liberation of Christology," 140.

57. Ruether, "The Liberation of Christology," 147.

58. McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, viii.

59. For a survey on approaches to the historical Jesus, see Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History*. More nuanced approaches to the historical Jesus that describes that narrative as realistic revelation include Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ* and Johnson*, The Real Jesus*.

60. While this will not be pursued in detail here, it should be noted that there is quite a comfortable consensus between evangelical egalitarians, feminist, and liberal scholarship. Johnson, *Consider Jesus*, 108–10. Also see, Spencer, "Jesus's Treatment of Women," 126–41.

as "Abba" further reiterates the liberating and incomparable love the prophets preached. Moreover, his life culminates in the cross. The feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson makes the case that the maleness of Jesus offers the "kenosis of patriarchy . . . for a man to live and die in this way in a world of male privilege is to challenge the patriarchal ideal of the dominating male at its root."[61] Something similar can be said of how Jesus is a "king." Jesus can be said to be king in the sense of his royal lineage going back to David, thus he was identifiable as the messiah. But does this merely uphold the authority of human kings? It has been used this way just as father language has been used to uphold patriarchy. But this is a misunderstanding. His particular way of being the messianic king is very different than the way other kings operate. Jesus is a king without wealth or military might or earthly splendor. Jesus's kingship is shown through his servanthood as he washed his disciples' feet, and supremely in his humiliation in becoming "last" on the cross (Mark 10:31–45). The narrative, both ironically and accurately, notes the sign above him at the cross which reads, "King of the Jews," as Jesus's reign is cruciform not oppressive. It is glorious because it is humble. Jesus's kingdom is the cross, self-sacrificial love with complete obedience to righteousness. Thus, if a king (or any leader) seeks to be a king like Jesus, to wield capability this way, they would be obliged to do so in a completely humble and even powerless way.[62] This is important to keep in mind as well because most conservatives are theologically in favor of democracy and not a strict monarchy, suggesting the kingship of Jesus can make possible the negation of human monarchy into a form of government that upholds the spirit of Jesus's kingdom.

Similarly, the maleness of Jesus should in fact be used to call into question patriarchy with Jesus's kenosis of power.

---

61.   Johnson, *Consider Jesus*, 111. Similarly, LaCugna writes, "The total identification of God with Jesus the Son, even unto death on a cross, makes impossible to think of God as a distant, omnipotent monarch who rules the world just as any patriarch rules over his family and possessions." LaCugna, "Baptismal Formula," 243.

62.   Similarly, to be a "citizen of heaven" (Phil 3:20) calls into question any nationalist view of citizenship.

Athanasius writes, "Men are not really fathers and really sons, but shadows of the True."[63] Similarly, Paul Ricoeur notes that it is in the Son, who is at one with the Father, that there is the decisive rejection of Freudian projections.[64] It must be maintained, then, that metaphorical reference begins a process of conceptualizing God's love, and God's actions in Jesus Christ fully particularize and define God through the narrative. Names and titles carry denotation, but they are only fully clarified through the full scope of a character's action.

As patriarchy is shown to be rooted in the curse of Eve, "your desire will be for your husband but he will rule over you" (Gen 3:16), and as a part of the death of sin entering the world, Jesus's resurrection shows the victory over this sin. The Father raises the Son, further implying this language is counter-oppressive in the possibilities of hope it opens. In the Pentecost formation of the church, the incarnation continues by incorporating people into Christ's body. While the church is not Jesus in one sense, this language does show the inclusion of all races, classes, and gender into Christ. Thus, while the historical Jesus is male (and Jewish), the exalted Jesus, by the Spirit, takes on all flesh into the body of Christ.[65] Thus, writers like Clement are in a sense correct to argue that Christ has both a male and a female nature. The incarnation (though he does not distinguish between pre- and post-resurrected identity) is the assumption of all human nature in Jesus in conformality with God's essence of love:

> For what further need has God of the mysteries of love? And then you shall look into the bosom of the Father, whom God the only-begotten Son alone has declared. And God Himself is love; and out of love to us became feminine. In His ineffable essence He is Father; in His compassion to us He became Mother. The Father by loving became feminine: and the great proof of this is He whom He begot of Himself; and the fruit brought forth by love is love.[66]

63.   Athanasius, *Four Discourses*, ch. 6.
64.   Ricoeur, "Fatherhood."
65.   This is laid out in Johnson, "Redeeming the Name of Christ: Christology," 129.
66.   Clement of Alexandria, "Who is the Rich Man?," 37.

Clement is one of many writers that sees Jesus's concern for Israel wanting to "gather her chicks under her wings" (Matt 23:37–38) as displaying a nature, while historically male, nevertheless, is fully reconciled with femininity. And thus, the title "Mother Christ" is attested to in several writers such as Anselm,[67] Bernard of Clairvaux,[68] and Julian of Norwich (who will be discussed later). Such pairing within the early Christian tradition demonstrates that while masculine language is conventional, it is not exclusive. In fact, when one understands what it is saying, the reason why Jesus's maleness works for all humanity is the very reason it permits femininity: it shows God's agapeic love.

If Jesus is God Immanuel, present to all creation and all flesh, who taught the lifting up of women, the self-emptying of patriarchy in the cross, and the defeat of sin in the resurrection, then the pattern of Jesus offers a way of understanding both male and female language. Could these contours of Christology render the possibility of a creative and disruptive depiction of Jesus as female? Certainly, similar licenses are taken with Jesus's ethnicity to reiterate the incarnation of Jesus of all flesh. Is the depiction of Jesus as "Christa," like the crucifix sculpted by Edwina Sandys (in 2016) that hangs in St. John the Divine Church in New York, actually theologically accurate?

Trinitarian

The fifth grammar that structures Christian discourse is trinitarian. How one speaks of God must conform to the structure where God reveals the oneness of God's being in three persons of eternal loving relationship and unified action. Paul described the three identities of God perhaps best in his benediction in 2 Cor

---

67.   Anslem writes, "And you, Jesus, are you not also a mother? Are you not the mother who, like a hen, gathers her chickens under her wings?" Anselm, *The Prayers and Meditations*, 153.

68.   Bernard of Clairvaux (*Letter 322*): "Do not let the roughness of our life frighten your tender years. If you feel the stings of temptation . . . suck not so much the wounds as the breasts of the Crucified. He will be your mother, and you will be his son" (quoted in Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 117).

13:14, "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." The Trinity in John's writings displays a pattern of love in God's essence that the disciples are invited into (John 15:9–17; 17:20–23; 1 John 4:7–21).

Trinitarian grammar in conservative theology has been used to support the notion that the first member of the Trinity is definitively named "Father," committing a literalization of what this means. This is not without warrant in church history, as Tertullian refused it as an analogical title: "Whereas other analogical terms like Lord and Judge indicate a merely functional relation to the world, the names Father and Son point to an ontological relation of distinct persons within the godhead itself."[69] But is it necessarily the case that because father language is realistic it therefore creates an exclusive ontological reference?

Meanwhile, in feminist theology, McFague would not see the trinitarian language of Father, Son, and Spirit as "naming" God so much as offering a three-fold metaphor of God's mystery, physicality, and mediation.[70] This is reminiscent of a modalism that, as the early church thinkers warned, does not do justice to the three-fold personal revelation that upholds God's identity as love itself. If God's identity as love itself is lost, something vital to liberation is lost with it. Just as literalism ironically misses key features and intentions of the biblical text, the pragmatic approach can, by having a reaction against biblical authority and realistic revelation, undermine the means within the Christian community whereby liberation can be endorsed. Thus, the following clarifications are necessary.

First, "Father" is not the proper name of the first member of the Trinity. The maleness of Jesus, his message of the loving God as "Abba" (Mark 14:36; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6—one should note also that then "Abba" is not employed in three out of four Gospels), his self-emptying in the cross, and vindication in

---

69. Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean*, 9–10, as quoted in Bloesch, *Word and Spirit*, 295n77.

70. McFague, *The Body of God*, 193.

resurrection all support father language as counter-patriarchal.[71] Does this mean father language is irreplicable? Is "Father" the definitive name of God, the first member of the Trinity? Some argued that the names of the Trinity replace Yahweh in the New Testament.[72] Those who advocate this forget that Jesus used a more intimate term: "Abba." Accordingly, "Father" is not the name of the first member of the Trinity just as "Son" is not Jesus's given name. God's primary name, as R. Kendall Soulen points out, is and remains, the ineffable "I Am." Father, Son, and Spirit, are, as he calls them, "inflections" that reveal relational roles that bear witness to how the oneness of the "I Am" has three personal identities.[73] What this means is that "father" is not a name per se so much as a term of endearment, witnessing to how Jesus bears the messianic title of "Son." These identities act as a coordinating witness in Jesus's baptism, ministry of proclaiming the kingdom, his transfiguration, and especially his death on the cross and resurrection. They are relational roles identifying the narrative character of God's ineffable love. Context is not all determining, but neither is it irrelevant. Jesus reiterates "Father" because of its capacity to communicate the incomparable love the prophets preached over and against the austerity and arrogance of the Pharisees' understanding of how they were children of "Father Jacob" and "Father Abraham" (John 4:12; 8:56). The fact that the Father and the Spirit are identified with male pronouns are not reifications of God's gender so much as witnesses of God's identification with Jesus Christ's work, whose own maleness as already been explained in the previous rule. For the Gospels, the title "Father" is showing not the gender of the first member of the Trinity, nor even a biological relation between Father and Son, but Jesus as the fulfillment of the character of the God of the Old Testament. While "Father" is used in the Gospels, as previously noted, the portraits of God in the Old Testament were not exclusively male. Thus, the

71.   This is similarly argued in Visser't Hooft, *The Fatherhood of God*.

72.   Particularly adamant is Kimel, "The God who Likes His Name," 188–208.

73.   Soulen, "The Name of the Holy Trinity," 244–61.

vindication of God's identity in Jesus is shown through the "Father" but this action is not exclusively bound or understood exclusively through one word describing a male-gendered parent.

This is a warranted abstraction. In classic theology, the title "Father" cannot be literalized, as Arius used the notion that God is the father of Jesus to imply that there was a time when the Son was not, as no son is the same age as his father. To this, the title "Father" and language of being "begotten" had to be abstracted and qualified to respect the divinity of the Son. Likewise, "Father" cannot be used to speak concretely of gender either, and if its use is not about gender, insisting on it can miss its very meaning. Insisting on it as a proper name as a denotative literalization then misses what it is trying to communicate, and risks supplanting the "I Am" name of God to which the triune identities point, along with the other biblical images, that give meaning to God's action.

This means that the baptismal phrase "in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit" is not inherently offensive, but it does invite a deeper explanation to prevent misusage. As a way of witnessing to the character of the "I Am" God in Jesus Christ, it must not be understood apart from its essentially counter-patriarchal form, which it sadly often has. But does this mean that mother language cannot be substituted in? Traditionalists have tried to insist that it cannot, meanwhile revisionists have offered all sorts of alternatives, which often appear awkward or even modalist (such as McFague's suggestion). Nevertheless, "Mother, Son, and Spirit" is permissible alongside the classic language based on the analogical and metaphoric grammars previously stated, but one does so at the risk of giving the impression of misunderstanding the witnessing pattern of the classic phrase. Here, a tension exists between father language being normative and good, but mother language being possible and permissible.

Second, it is worth asking: can people "name" God? While Yahweh is the proper name of God and Jesus uses the term of endearment "Abba," this does not mean all attempts to use alternative language are subjective preferential assertions or projections. This is seen in the use of the word "trinity" itself. "Trinity," it should be noted, is not a word found in the Bible. It is the

innovation proposed first by Tertullian, who also suggested a "three persons and one being" vocabulary that later thinkers further developed. This vocabulary is also not explicitly mentioned in the Bible, along with other terms of creedal orthodoxy. Biblicist Christians have struggled with this, but if the term trinity is acceptable and used in Christian worship to identify God, this speaks of the possibility of extra-biblical description that, while not literally stated in the text, has the capacity to encapsulate the whole meaning of the biblical message in a single term. Thus, the term trinity is an essential grammar for reading the biblical narrative properly. In worship, churches sing, "Blessed Trinity," and it seems that the designation of "Trinity" is able to offer a name-like title that describes accurately what God has revealed, despite it being a post-biblical description. Therefore, if this is true, in encountering God and being invited to respond, there is a kind of doxological capacity to further name God in ways that coincide with biblical revelation. Female experience is then, in conversation with God, able to suggest further names. Perhaps one of the earliest and most beautiful examples of this is when God rescues Hagar after Abraham casted her out. Genesis reports that she names the Lord who spoke with her *El-roi*, which means "The One Who Sees" (Gen 16:13). If what Hagar has done is legitimate, this suggests that believers are able to view the acts of God and are permitted to form names of God that praise God if they are congruent with canonical revelation. While father language is normative in function for many, it need not be viewed as exclusive.

Perhaps a third insight brings home this triune application of naming. As Augustine showed, the trinitarian relationships speak of God's essential identity as love. Augustine interpreted the trinitarian relationships as displaying God as lover, beloved, and the gift of love itself.[74] God is agapeic love. Not that love is God, but that agapeic love bears witness to God's character shown in the cross of Christ. To further the analogical way of speaking of God, where there is agapeic action, its goodness is from and participates in God's agapeic goodness. One thinks of Robert

74. Augustine, *The Trinity*, 8:5:10, 14.

Munch's book, *Love You Forever*, as a beautiful illustration that preachers are free to use in sermons coinciding with the metaphorical grammars previously spelled out. The mother says to her child, "I love you forever. I'll like you for always. As long as I am living my baby you'll be."[75] As moments of forgiveness and self-giving are moments where one's cross is taken-up and one embodies Christ, so also moments of motherly love speak of the being of God.

One touching example is worth mentioning. On January 7, 2015, Katherine Benefiel died in a housefire. Firefighters pulled her body out to find that she died shielding her five-year-old son from the flames.[76] She died protecting her child. Does not God love like this? Is not this love capable of illustrating what God does in Christ? Both the fatherly love and the motherly love that sacrifices for one's children speaks of the entire being of God, naming the action of all members of the Trinity, not just one. So, "Mother" need not be a title that replaces Father in the classic baptismal formula or Lord's Prayer—if they are understood in their counter-patriarchal intention—but "Mother" can be a way of identifying the love characteristic of each member and their whole being. This is the approach of Julian of Norwich (d. 1416) who famously referred to Christ as her Mother while not trying to revise his maleness: "he is our Mother."[77] She also applied motherhood to the whole Trinity: "the high might of the Trinity is our Father, and the deep wisdom of the Trinity is our Mother, and the great love of the Trinity is our Lord."[78] She refers to the entirety of the Trinity as having the properties of fatherliness, motherliness, and lordship, while referring to Jesus as "Mother Christ." Similarly, the theologian Joseph Jones has proposed the benediction: "God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, One God, Mother of us all."[79]

---

75. Munch, *Love You Forever*, [n.p.].
76. Sadly, the son died later due to his injuries, but that should not take away from the beauty of her own action. "Child Injured in Apt. Fire Dies."
77. Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, ch. 58.
78. Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, ch. 58.
79. Jones, *Grammar of Christian Faith*, 165.

Therefore, the trinitarian grammar qualifies the meaning of "Father" as a triune reference, but in turn, the term "Trinity" actually offers a pathway of naming God in ways that capture God's characteristics as the one revealed in the Gospel narrative, particularly seeing agapeic love as witness and therefore resource for referring to the Triune God.

Pneumatological

The last grammar might be called pneumatic, coinciding with the imminence of the Spirit in creation and God's inbreaking kingdom. The Spirit of God as the basis of life, the wisdom that fashioned creation with the first member of the Trinity, reiterates that all that is good in creation finds its source in God's goodness, but also further, the Spirit prophetically challenges idolatrous reductions of God to the creation, equipping the church for liberation. Speech of God must be life-affirming and liberating if it conforms to the Spirit.

Here again, there are characteristic misunderstandings in both conservative and feminist estimates. There is a conservative tendency to dismiss feminine language for the Spirit as unrealistic, particularly as it pertains to Lady Wisdom.[80] There is also a refusal to see gendered experience as a basis of theological reflection. Elizabeth Morelli writes,

> . . . insofar as we understand our access to God to be the very ground or core of the human spirit, then we cannot attribute to woman *qua* woman a specific conscious access to God. To do so would be to assert that woman is not quite human, or that there are two distinct human natures.[81]

Furthermore, there is a refusal to see pragmatic usages as offering the capacity to assess the meaning of convictions.[82] Meanwhile, the feminist priority of experience and liberation over and

---

80.   Fyre, "Language for God," 36.
81.   Morelli, "The Question of Woman's Experience," 236.
82.   Molnar, *Divine Freedom*, 9. Molnar's criticism of Johnson is that she appeals overly to functional language, thus causing "desired social outcomes" to set the standard for God. This is frankly a caricature of Johnson's argument.

against revelation has unintended consequences. Strict appeals to human experience, whether feminine experience or human liberation as generalized categories, are challenged with the apparent plurality and ambiguity regarding what these mean if un-legitimated by realistic revelation. This is because language and symbols are malleable in how they are employed. Thus, general usage does not offer any clear guarantee that it will aid in liberating forms of life.[83] Religions with strong goddess figures are not necessarily less patriarchal.[84] Also, as Pamela Dickey Young notes, "there must be something normative in Christian identity and tradition prior to practice for a liberating practice to be normative. If not, others can preferentially claim their own practices as 'Christian' because principled criteria would have collapsed."[85] All experience is interpreted experience, and within patriarchal discourses, there are various ad hoc rationales and polemics employed where at times female voices can even be the defenders of patriarchal convictions. If a certain hierarchical social order is seen as proscribed by God and viewed as essential to trusting in God and God's authority, of course, questioning it does not seem at face value an attempt to be liberating. Thus, experience and liberation can be pliable categories and need further clarifications in particular forms of life and narratives of reference. Therefore, several clarifications are needed.

First, as the Spirit is the Spirit of life, coinciding with the previous analogical, metaphorical, and incarnational grammars, all of life *qua* life speaks of God. The Spirit is the source of order in creation (Gen 1:1–2). The Spirit is what renders life alive (Gen 2:7; Job 33:4; Ps 33:6). As Paul proclaims to the Athenians, in an astounding example, they are actually worshipping God through the altar to an unknown God (Acts 17:23). "For in him, we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). This is a fascinating

83. So warns LaCugna, "God in Communion," 107.

84. Note, as Hanson argues, that while the religion of Israel by today's standards is quite patriarchal and regressive towards women, it was quite progressive in its own day against religions with more feminine depictions of deity, such as Babylonian and Philistine religion. Hanson, "Masculine Metaphors for God," 318.

85. Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology*, 77.

instance as Paul quotes pagan poets, whose cultural conclusion about God being the Father over all, with all humanity as his off-spring, becomes the basis by which the Gospel of Jesus Christ is introduced and repentance preached. As the Spirit is the basis of all goodness and being, wherever these are found, it is possible to speak about God alongside of them because they are understood to point to faith in Jesus Christ.[86] Note, then, that there is a kind of aporia: while all life speaks of God, this is really only truly seen as life through God. Just as narrative and name become mutually clarifying, so also works of creation and the descriptions of the Creator become mutually enriching. To affirm this possibility can be profoundly dignifying in a way that men, who have always heard male language, can fail to appreciate. [87]

Second, the imminence of God's creative activity is personified in the character of Lady Wisdom, which forms a viable way God reveals femininity. If Lady Wisdom in Proverbs is a pre-figure of the Holy Spirit, hypostasized wisdom is described as a "she" (Prov 1–9, but particularly 8:22–36). Many are content to dismiss Lady Wisdom as a personification, but given how strong the description of her is in the intertestamental literature such as the Wisdom of Solomon, where she is described as sharing in the divine prerogatives, this dismissal is not warranted. "She is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty" (Wis 7:25). "Although she is but One, she can do all things" (Wis 7:27). Wisdom is described as next to God at the

---

86.   This is methodologically explicated in Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 17–39. "Anyone that stylizes revelation and experience into alternatives, ends up with revelations that cannot be experienced and experiences without revelation" (7). He goes on to say that God is the condition of all experience through the Spirit, and thus, properly understood through Christ, God is "in, with, and beneath" the experiences of everyday life (34).

87.   Boulais-Duong, "The Power of a Pronoun" (blog), October 8, 2019. "I felt all the breath go out of my lungs and tears brim in my eyes. Only once before had I publicly heard the Christian God being referred to with a feminine pronoun. Then, just as it was that gray Sunday morning, the experience was powerful . . . I began using 'she' for God in my private prayers and journals. At times, I called her 'mother.' Using the feminine pronoun for God helped me to feel seen, valued, and affirmed in a way that I hadn't experienced yet as a woman in ministry."

throne and they together formed humanity (Wis 9:2–4). She is described in chs. 10–12 as doing all the actions of God in protecting the patriarchs, ransoming Israel out of Egypt, bringing them into the promise land, granting salvation to the righteous, and punishing the wicked. Lady Wisdom is identified as the Holy Spirit in Wis 7:7 ("I called on God and the Spirit of Wisdom came to me") and 9:17 ("Who has learned your counsel, unless you have given wisdom and sent your Holy Spirit from on high?"). If the deuterocanonical wisdom literature is at all illuminative of what Proverbs is speaking about,[88] then it is definitive: one member of the Trinity is identifiably female, and, according to the grammar of trinitarian attributes, what one has the others participate in as well. Athanasius suggested, an attribute that one has as deity, the other must also have as well, all except to say that they are the same person.[89] As Augustine argued, what one member does in history, all do eternally.[90] If God not only has Spirit but is Spirit,[91] and the Spirit is identified as a "she" in the Lady Wisdom prefigures, then this is a viable way to refer to God's entire being.[92] While the Spirit is the "Spirit of Christ" in the New Testament, the actions of the Spirit retain these motherly qualities.[93] Most notably, Matt 11:19 states that "Wisdom is known by her deeds," which may be referring to the Holy Spirit as Lady Wisdom acting in Christ. Whether or not this is metaphorical, "her" is used as a viable pronoun for referring to the Holy Spirit as the "Spirit of Wisdom" (Eph 1:17). This invalidates any strict attempt to argue that the Lady Wisdom language

88.   Other references: Sir 24; Wis 6–9; Bar 3–4; 1 En. 42; 2 En. 30.

89.   Athanasius, *Four Discourses*, 3:4.

90.   Augustine, *The Trinity*, 1:2:4; 7. "Just as Father, Son, and Spirit are inseparable, so do they work inseparably." The more technical parsing is that what each member does "ad extra" that is individually in history, the one God does "ad intra," within God's eternal being.

91.   This is the approach of Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 15, 24–32.

92.   This is developed by Johnson, *She Who Is*, 86–87.

93.   For example, John 3:8 speaks of being "born again" by the Spirit. It may be argued that the dove of Jesus's baptism (e.g., Luke 3:22) is an allusion to the action of the Spirit "hovering" over the waters of creation (Gen 1:2) along with other allusions to a mother bird (Deut 32:11–12; Ps 57:1). Similarly, Jesus and Paul use the mother bird imagery (Matt 23:37–38; 1 Thess 2:7).

categorically ceases in the New Testament. Moreover, there is substantial evidence that the Spirit was worshipped in ancient Christianity as the "Mother of Christ."[94] To worship God "in Spirit" more than permits female usages based on the Old Testament pre-figures and early church examples. The early church did not see Father language so exclusive as to refuse others alongside of it.

Third, Christian faith purports that if God is God there is no domain of reality, and thus human experience, that is extraneous or meaningless to the creator of it and the Spirit of life. Thus, the question regarding experience as a source for Christian theology

---

94.   van Oort, "The Holy Spirit as Feminine." Notable examples he cites include Origen, who states, "For if he who does the will of the Father in heaven is Christ's brother and sister and mother, and if the name of brother of Christ may be applied, not only to the race of men, but to beings of diviner rank than they, then there is nothing absurd in the Holy Spirit's being His Mother" (*Comm. Jo.* 2:6). Jerome concurs, both Origen and Jerome seem to be commentating on a passage from the lost Gospel to the Hebrews, but then looking to other biblical passages noting the femininity of the Spirit: "And also this: (in the text) 'like the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress' (Ps 123:2), the maid is the soul and the mistress is the Holy Spirit. For also in that Gospel written according to the Hebrews, which the Nazoreans read, the Lord says: 'Just now, my Mother, the Holy Spirit, took me.' Nobody should be offended by this, for among the Hebrews the Spirit is said to be of the feminine gender although in our language it is called to be of masculine gender and in the Greek language neuter" (*Comm. Isa.* 11:40:9). Ephiphanius who states, "Next he describes Christ as a kind of power and also gives His dimensions . . . And the Holy Spirit is (said to be) like Christ, too, but She is a female being" (*Pan.* 19:4:1–2). Hippolytus who says similarly, "There should also be a female with Him (i.e., with Christ as an angel) . . . The male is the Son of God and the female is called the Holy Spirit" (*Haer.* 9:13:3). Melito of Sardis has a prayer invoking worship that reads as follows: "Hymn the Father, you holy ones; sing to your Mother, virgins" (Frag. 17). In discussing chastity before marriage, Aphrahat states, "As long as a man has not taken a wife he loves and reveres God his Father and the Holy Spirit his Mother, and he has no other love" (*Dem.* 18). Aphrahat then describes the work of the Spirit in baptism as that of a female dove: "From baptism we receive the Spirit of Christ, and in the same hour that the priests invoke the Spirit, she opens the heavens and descends, and hovers over the waters (cf. Gen 1:2), and those who are baptized put Her on" (*Dem.* 6). These examples are enough to warrant that the ancient church did at times include mother and father language in its theology and worship.

should not be whether but how. The biblical narrative and core Christian convictions open Christian theology up to experience and experience to conviction. The revelation of all humanity in the image of God, the kingdom of God where the lowly are raised up, the saving of all flesh in the incarnation of Christ, the Spirit being poured out on all flesh, a community that calls to listen and discern, etc., are all criterial resources that are authentically Christian and biblical by which female voices (or any that can be identified as victimized, oppressed, abused, etc.) can and must become normative for Christian faithfulness. Thus, incorporating other voices results in undoing the ways patriarchal discourses have suppressed not only women today, but even the full content of Christian history and its Scriptures. Pamela Dickey Young offers good nuance in this regard in stating that "women's experience" means several things: (1) Women's bodies as different from men's; (2) Women's social experience where submission of women is emphasized and sexual appeal to men is emphasized; (3) Women have experience of direct oppression based on gender; (4) Women's historical experience is often "lost" and in need of recovery; and (5) women's experience can thus be the catalyst for social change.[95]

Fourth, to go further, this pneumatic aspect of thinking about God shows that imminence of the Spirit is the presence of liberation, such that the feminist pragmatic criterion, when understood through the biblical narrative (not despite it), is valid. A few examples illustrate this: Isa 61:1–3 indicates that the Spirit will come upon the anointed messiah (which Jesus claims for his own in Luke 4:18–19) and that his message is one of "good news to the oppressed," "binding up the broken hearted," "freedom to the captives," and "release of the prisoners." Meanwhile, Jesus, echoing the prophets, warned that "they honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Matt 15:8). Mere assent to certain language cannot demonstrate true sincerity or purity of belief. Only action shows this. As Paul identifies the gift of the Spirit upon all people regardless of bias, so also the gifts of the Spirit are bestowed in coinciding fashion (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor

95. Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology*, 53–56.

12:13). If Gentiles are justified by the Spirit, then women are also gifted to lead the church by this same unprejudiced Spirit. This forms an important rule: "where the Spirit is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:17). This is not dualistic, spiritualized inner freedom nor is it the liberal obsession with autonomy apart from morality, but rather, material liberty to respond to God's call. Scripture itself then permits a means by which its language can be criticized if it is being used against its own liberating intention. In Matthew, Christ instructs that teachers are known (and therefore their teaching is assessed) by their fruit (Matt 7:17). Paul similarly seems to, in part, reject circumcision despite its theological import in the Old Testament because it was being used to foster ethnic superiority. For Paul, circumcision does not fulfill its purpose, where only "faith expressing itself through love" (Gal 5:6) counts; in other words, actions that produce the fruit of the Spirit, "against such things there are no law" (Gal 5:23). The Spirit is seen in the effects of convictions, and the Spirit can then judge between what words are dead letters or living words.

This permits the final aspect of pneumatic grammar: the potential for prophetic and iconoclastic revisions. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel once said that "The prophet is an iconoclast, challenging the apparently holy, revered, and awesome. Beliefs cherished as certainties, instructions endowed with supreme sanctity, he [or she—did Heschel forget about Deborah and Huldah?] exposes as scandalous pretension."[96] While the theology and practices of the temple were instituted by none other than Moses, essential to understanding the presence of God with the people, the prophets' message overtly negated and contradicted these institutes as they were used to foster apathy, arrogance, and neglect of justice. In the face of the promises of God to protect and be with the people, they proclaimed prophetic messages such as the message of Hosea: "You are not my people and I am not your God" (Hos 1:9). They did not hesitate to negate convictions central to Israel's revealed testimony, whether affirmations of God's character, God's promises, the laws, and the temple, when

---

96.   Heschel, *The Prophets*, 1:10.

their function caused the neglect of sincerity, humility, justice, and righteousness.

Similarly, Jesus continued these prophetic critiques of the temple sacrifices and purity laws. Jesus's use of "Abba" brings an intimacy to God language where the Pharisees stressed distance, countering how their convictions functioned. Scripture does permit the reflection and revision of symbols and images in light of their intended purposes. If God can be Father but not Mother, moreover, if it functions to prioritize the male over the female, that might be a good indication that God has been reduced to a thing.[97] The accusation that this can be "idolatrous" is harsh but accurate. If father language is used to overtly or implicitly reinforce patriarchy, the necessity of prophetic iconoclasm is apparent, just as the temple needed to have its tables turned. God's transcendence is given realistically in imminence, but these do not mean it can be grasped so as to be taken for granted. Prophetic discourse, as Ricoeur notes, inherently "reorients by first disorienting," through hyperboles and iconoclastic negations.[98] However, there is always a challenge. For example, praying the "Our Mother" gives the impression that biblical revelation is being subverted by human assertion (as the concerns of the earlier grammars have shown), and thus doing so may be counterproductive in some congregations. However, the notion that language cannot be negated with others in a kind of prophetic or iconoclastic mode fails to realize that this is permitted in how the Bible uses its own language with other terms. It is not whether it can be permitted, it is whether the congregation has been taught to listen to hear it for what it is.[99] Where the grammar is not understood, the words are unintelligible. The question then becomes, have many churches failed to cultivate the listening practices necessary to be open to prophetic voices? The notion that an iconoclastic revision cannot happen may be the very reason why it should.

---

97. McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 190.
98. Ricoeur, "Naming God," 229.
99. See Chilton and Harmon, "Conclusion," 293–308.

Thus, the pneumatological adds the final grammar that brings this investigation full circle. The Spirit's imminence in creation allows for the goodness of creation *qua* creation and the human *qua* human to offer data to reflect on God. Rather than being independent of revelation or the Bible filtering these sources, the Bible should be understood to aid in equipping the person to listen to these sources rightly, or else experience is prone to ambiguity. When this is done, the Bible puts forward liberation of the marginalized as a valid criterion for evaluation, fostering the possibility of prophetic and iconoclastic discourses and actions that are in keeping with how the Prophets and Jesus handled their own religious heritage.

Conclusion

Thus, in determining gendered language for God, certain grammars need to be upheld: (1) language cannot neglect to articulate itself in a way that upholds realistic revelation (and it is in a deeper understanding of revelation that simple proof-texts are rendered problematic); (2) language does not speak in a literalistic way, reducing God to the created order or failing to uphold divine transcendence and ineffability; (3) language is problematic if it refuses the goodness of creation that all speaks of God in analogical and metaphorical ways; (4) language must pattern itself based on the narratives of God's works and it cannot be out of congruence with the narratives of the life of Jesus Christ, his death, and resurrection; (5) language cannot refuse a Triune structure of agapeic love; and finally, (6) language must be in agreement with the prophetic and liberating imminence of the Spirit, Lady Wisdom. These grammars are not posited as separate rules, but rather each works in conjunction with the others.

Readers of this essay may find it frustrating in the way that essays attempting a middle-ground, mediating view can be. This essay may be one man's critique of feminist theology alongside of more nuanced feminists and a critique of conservative theology through the appropriation of voices from the tradition. Conservatives will undoubtably notice that liturgical revision is regarded here as more than permissible since the claim that

"Father" is a proper name does not hold water, much less the notion that the Bible does not contain direct references and implicit logic by which God can be considered feminine and a mother. This essay has demonstrated this on multiple fronts. Conservatives fear that the loss of the title Father de-particularizes the divine identity. However, given Scripture's own diversity on the matter, and the fact that particularization happens through the whole of the narrative with all of its language holistically, not by just one word, this is simply not the case. Meanwhile, some feminists may dislike the conclusion that not all father language is patriarchal,[100] and in fact, that it can be intended to counter patriarchy. Furthermore, some may not like that the experience of women (or the category of "liberation") is not so uniform and clear as some would purport it to be to legitimate a revisionist agenda. Yet, this contextual aspect of grammar means that this conclusion eludes simple proscriptions. This is important to stress because talk of experience often gives the impression that men prefer father language and women prefer mother language, that liturgical language should be revised to have a neat 50/50 split in the references, or that mother language is always the solution to curb patriarchy in all contexts. Jürgen Moltmann has written on why feminism liberates men from patriarchy as well,

---

100. Biggs, "Gender and God-Talk," 15–25. Biggs provides clear and nuanced work, offering a similar grammatical reflection as this essay (although he does not call it that). He shows the contexts of Father language in the midst of paganism and how Father language moves from being analogical to self-defining, and thus makes a case for its enduring importance: "God is revealed using 'Father' language in Scripture in a way that 'Mother' language never reveals God in Scripture" (23). However, he admits, ". . . both are coherent and respectable positions which take account of how language works and what the biblical evidence is, and which take the Bible seriously in Christian life and thinking . . . My own practice encapsulates my ability to defend both sides of the matter: I continue to pray to God as Father, but believe that God would not in fact mind if I did otherwise. If those of both opinions were equally at ease with each other in this matter then perhaps that would be appropriate to the complexity of sorting out the question of gender and God-talk" (24).

which must be emphasized.[101] Meanwhile, Janet Martin Soskice has written on how feminists can productively employ father language.[102] Usage is more complex than simple solutions. While there are versions of feminism that undermine revealed realism and versions of conservatism that are prone to literalization, what this essay argues is that just as traditional language is not by intention sexist, so too there is liberty to use mother references.[103] To some extent, the intent of this essay is to show that those that are concerned about the authority of revelation and those that are concerned about the liberation of women ought not to be so opposed. When the grammar of revelation is understood, a liberty of usages, that are in turn liberating, becomes possible and, in many ways, necessary. When the grammar of liberation is understood, deep regard for biblically normed discourse is necessary. Liberation renders revelation faithfully, while revelation renders liberation intelligibly.[104]

101.　Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*. His chapter "Feminist Theology for Men" (268–93) is a good argument for why feminism is not just beneficial to women.

102.　See Soskice, "Can a Feminist?" 94. "Does the 'father God' have a future? If Christianity has a future, then the answer is probably 'yes.'"

103.　For an excellent pastoral resource, see Smith, *Is It Okay to Call God "Mother?"* It is a rich yet easy to understand resource for a church board or Bible study group.

104.　LaCugna concludes something similar in "God in Communion," 107: "If the Christian community were truly to become that which it is destined to become, namely, the community of all persons who have realized their common vocation to praise and glorify God and to be united in service to others, then the question whether to call God Mother or Father would take on a different significance. In a true community of stewards, where orthopraxis (practice of truth) would finally have coincided with orthodoxy (right opinion about the mystery of salvation), the whole range of human experience would be incorporated into our praise with God. This is where the trinitarian and Christian feminist agenda intersect. In the current controversy it is essential to keep in mind that all of us are united in the common desire to praise God."

Bibliography

Achtemeier, Elizabeth. "Exchanging God for 'No gods': A Discussion of Female Language for God." In *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenges of Feminism*, edited by Alvin F. Kimel, Jr., 1–16. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.

Anderson, Ray. "The Incarnation of God in Feminist Christology: A Theological Critique." In *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenges of Feminism*, edited by Alvin F. Kimel, Jr., 288–312. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.

Anselm of Canterbury. *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm with the Proslogion*. Translated by Sister Benedicta Ward. New York: Penguin, 1997.

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Translated by Anton Pegis. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1955.

Athanasius. *Four Discourses Against the Arians*. In *Athanasius, Selected Works and Letters*. Vol. 4 of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971.

Augustine. *The Trinity*. Translated by Edmund Hill. 2nd ed. New York: New York City Press, 2015.

Biale, David. "The God with Breasts: El Shaddai in the Bible." *History of Religions* 21 (1982) 240–56.

Biggs, Richard. "Gender and God-Talk: Can We Call God 'Mother'?" *Themelios* 29 (2004) 15–25.

Bloesch, Donald. *Battle for the Trinity.* Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 1985.

———. *Is the Bible Sexist?* Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001.

———. *A Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority and Method in Theology.* Exeter: Paternoster, 1992.

Boulais-Duong, Lindsey. "The Power of a Pronoun: How What We Call God Affects Everything." *Mutuality*, October 8, 2019, https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/article/mutuality-blog-magazine/power-pronoun-how-what-we-call-god-affects-everything

Brueggemann, Walter. *Old Testament Theology.* Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

Carr, Anne. *Transforming Grace*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988.

"Child Injured in Harrison Apt. Fire Dies." KLRT-Fox16. January 15, 2015. https://www.fox16.com/news/child-injured-in-harrison-apt-fire-dies/.

Chilton, Amy, and Steven Harmon. "Conclusion: Light from Converted Listening." In *Sources of Light: Resources for Baptist Churches Practicing Theology*, edited by Amy Chilton and Steven Harmon, 293–308. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2020.

Chrysostom, John. *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*. Vol. 10 of *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1956.

Clement of Alexandria. *Christ the Educator*. Translated by Simon Wood. Fathers of the Church 23. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1954.

———. *Who is the Rich Man that Shall Be Saved?* Translated by G. W. Butterworth. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953.

Cooper, John. *Our Father in Heaven: Christian Faith and Inclusive Language for God*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998.

Daly, Mary. *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. Boston: Beacon, 1973.

"Declaration *Inter Insigniores* on the Question of Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood." *Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*. October 15, 1976. Online: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19761015_inter-insigniores_en.html

Dionysius. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works.* Translated by Colm Luibheid. New York: Paulist, 1987.

Frei, Hans. *The Identity of Jesus Christ*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997.

Fyre, Roland Mushat. "Language for God and Feminist Language: Problems and Principles." In *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenges of Feminism*, edited by Alvin F. Kimel, Jr., 17–43. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.

Geffe, Claude. "'Father' as the Proper Name of God." In *God as Father?*, edited by Johannes-Baptist Metz and Edward Schillebeeckx, 43–50. New York: Seabury, 1981.

Grenz, Stanley. *The Named God and the Question of Being*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005.

Grudem, Wayne, and John Piper, eds. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.

Gunton, Colin. "Proteus and Procrustes: A Study in the Dialectic of Language in Disagreement with Sallie McFague." In *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenges of Feminism*, edited by Alvin F. Kimel, Jr., 65–80. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.

Haddad, Mimi. "Evidence for and Significance of Feminine God Language from the Church Fathers to the Modern Era." *Priscilla Papers* (July 2004). No pages. Online: https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/article/priscilla-papers-academic-journal/evidence-and-significance-feminine-god-language?page=5.

Hamerton-Kelly, Robert. *God the Father: Theology and Patriarchy in the Teachings of Jesus*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1979.

Hanson, Paul. "Masculine Metaphors for God and Sex-discrimination in the Old Testament." *Ecumenical Review* 27 (1975) 316–24.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *The Prophets*. 2 vols. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.

Jewett, Paul. *God, Creation, and Revelation: A Neo-Evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.

Johnson, Elizabeth. *Consider Jesus*. New York: Crossroads, 1990.

———. "Redeeming the Name of Christ: Christology." In *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, edited by Catherine Mowry LaCugna, 115–27. New York: Harper Collins, 1993.

———. *She Who Is*. New York: Crossroad, 1993.

Johnson, Luke Timothy. *The Real Jesus*. New York: Harper-Collins, 1996.

Jones, Joseph. *Grammar of Christian Faith*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002.

Julian of Norwich. *Showings*. Translated by Edmund Colledge. New York: Paulist, 1978.

Kimel Jr., Alvin F. "The God who Likes His Name: Holy Trinity, Feminism, and the Language of Faith." In *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenges of Feminism*, edited by Alvin F. Kimel Jr., 188–208. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.

Kimel Jr., Alvin F., ed. *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenges of Feminism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.

LaCugna, Catherine Mowry. "The Baptismal Formula, Feminist Objections, and Trinitarian Theology." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26 (1989) 235–50.

———. "God in Communion with Us: The Trinity." In *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, edited by Catherine Mowry LaCugna, 83–114. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.

LaCugna, Catherine Mowry, ed. *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.

Lindbeck, George. *Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1984.

Long, D. Stephen. *Speaking of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.

Matthis, David. "Why Jesus Was Not A Woman." *Desiring God* (October 2020). No pages. Online: https://www.desiringgod .org/articles/why-jesus-was-not-a-woman.

McFague, Sallie. *The Body of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993.

————. *Metaphorical Theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982.

————. *Models of God.* Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988.

McGregor-Wright, R. K. "God, Metaphor, and Gender: Is the God of the Bible a Male Deity?" In *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, edited by Ronald Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, 287–301. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005.

Mollenkott, Virginia Ramsey. *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1987.

Molnar, Paul. *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity*. London: T. & T. Clark, 2002.

Moltmann, Jurgen. *Experiences in Theology*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000.

————. "The Fatherly Mother: Is Trinitarian Patripassianism Replacing Theological Patriarchalism?" In *God as Father?*, edited by Johannes-Baptist Metz and Edward Schillebeeckx, 51–56. New York: Seabury, 1981.

————. *Spirit of Life.* Translated by Margaret Kohl. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001.

Morelli, Elizabeth A. "The Question of Woman's Experience of God." In *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenges of Feminism*, edited by Alvin F. Kimel, Jr., 222–36. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.

Munch, Robert. *Love You Forever*. Toronto: Firefly, 1986.

Packer, J. I. *Knowing God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973.

Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Systematic Theology*. 3 vols. Translated by Geoffrey Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

Pinnock, Clark. *Flame of Love*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996.

Powell, Mark Allan. *Jesus as a Figure in History.* 2nd ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013.

"Resolution on God the Father." Online: https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/resolution-on-god-the-father/

Ricoeur, Paul. "Fatherhood: From Phantasm to Symbol." In *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, edited by Don Ihde, 468–98. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974.

———. "Naming God." In *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, edited by Richard Kearney, 217–35. Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1995.

———. *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies in the Creation of Meaning in Language*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. "The Liberation of Christology from Patriarchy." In *Feminist Theology: A Reader*, edited by Ann Loades, 138–47. London: SPCK, 1990.

———. *Sexism and God-Talk*. Boston: Beacon, 1983.

Schneiders, Sandra. "The Bible and Feminism: Biblical Theology." In *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, edited by Catherine Mowry LaCugna, 31–57. New York: Harper Collins, 1993.

Smith, Paul. *Is it Okay to Call God "Mother?"* Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993.

Soskice, Janet Martin. "Can a Feminist Call God 'Father'?" In *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenges of Feminism*, edited by Alvin F. Kimel, Jr., 81–94. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.

———. *Metaphor and Religious Language*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.

Soulen, R. Kendall. "The Name of the Holy Trinity: A Triune Name." *Modern Theology* 59 (2002) 244–61.

Spencer, Aida. "Jesus' Treatment of Women in the Gospels." In *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, edited by Ronald Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, 126–41. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005.

Teresa of Avila. *Interior Castle*. Translated by K. Kavanaugh and O. Rodriguez. New York: Paulist, 1979.

van Oort, Johannes. "The Holy Spirit as Feminine: Early Christian Testimonies and Their Interpretation." *Theological Studies* 72 (2016). No Pages. Online: https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/3225/7763.

Visser't Hooft, W. A. *The Fatherhood of God in an Age of Emancipation*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982.

Webb, William. *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Transcultural Analysis*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G. E. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1953.

Wright, G. Ernst. *God who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital*. Naperville, IL: Alec Allenson, 1960.

Young, Pamela Dickey. *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology: In Search of Method*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990.