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# SUPPLEMENTAL BUT NOT EQUAL: REPLY TO DELL'OLIO ON FEMININE LANGUAGE FOR GOD

John W. Cooper

This paper addresses central issues in the debate about inclusive language for God by responding to Andrew Dell'Olio, who offered biblical, theological, linguistic, and ethical reasons for a "supplemental" use of feminine language for God. Since he leaves unclear whether "supplemental" means "secondary to" or "fully equal to" the masculine language of the biblical tradition, it is difficult to determine whether he makes his case. While a secondary role for feminine language for God is legitimate, I argue that giving feminine language a status equal to the Bible's masculine language for God is not warranted by the standard biblical and theological criteria of the Christian tradition.

Andrew Dell'Olio's "Why Not God the Mother?"<sup>1</sup> challenges several common arguments against calling God "Mother:" that the Bible does not do so; that Jesus did not do so; that "Father" has a special linguistic status that the Bible's feminine imagery does not share; that using Mother language leads to pantheism. He uses a number of standard arguments to defend "the supplementary use of feminine language for God, including the term 'Mother-God'" (p. 193): that Scripture itself contains feminine language for God; that certain religious experiences can warrant "Mother" as a supplement to "Father;" that using only masculine language is tantamount to idolatry because God is ontologically ungendered; and that failure to use feminine language for God perpetuates sexism.

But Dell'Olio's article suffers from a significant ambiguity in "the supplementary use of feminine language for God." I will argue that it is permissible for faithful Christians to refer to God supplementally as "Mother" in certain ways and in certain contexts, but that we are not warranted by traditional Christian criteria in making "Mother" equal to "Father" in frequency of use, in linguistic status as a primary title, or in its role in religious and liturgical discourse.<sup>2</sup>

## *I. The Meaning of "Supplemental Feminine Language"*

Two broad and importantly different positions are currently debated. One regards feminine language for God as *supplementary but secondary*. It holds that "Father" and the rest of the biblical tradition's masculine vocabulary for God should remain the primary language of the Christian faith, but that "Mother" and other feminine references may sometimes be used in



secondary ways to “supplement” it.<sup>3</sup> The other position insists that feminine language is *supplementary and equal*.<sup>4</sup> “Mother” is just as appropriate as “Father” as a primary title or name for God in Scripture, the Triune Name, liturgy and worship, the Creeds, and in all Christian discourse. Most advocates of inclusive language for God (whom I call “inclusivists”) are aware of the supplemental but secondary position and reject it, insisting on fully egalitarian inclusivism.<sup>5</sup> Although Dell’Olio is not clear on which understanding of “supplementary” he means to defend, the arguments he uses and most of the writers to whom he appeals advocate fully egalitarian inclusivism, a position that I do not think can be warranted by the standards of historic Christianity.

## *II. Revelation and Religious Experience as Warranting Sources of Language for God*

How has ecumenical Christianity (Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant) understood revelation and extra-canonical religious experience as sources and warrants of language for God? This issue arises when Dell’Olio charges Elizabeth Achtemeier with limiting our language for God to the (masculine) language of the Bible (p. 194) and faults Donald Hook and Alvin Kimel for privileging the words of Jesus, who called God “Father” (pp. 197-99). He points to terms such as “Trinity” and “Perfect Being” as evidence that Christian tradition has not limited itself to the words of Jesus or the Bible. He appeals to divine revelation in creation and to post-biblical religious experience as legitimating sources of Mother language for God (p. 200).

Dell’Olio is surely correct to invoke natural revelation or natural knowledge of God and religious experience as traditional sources of language for God. But historic Christianity also acknowledges the definitive status of special or supernatural revelation as proclaimed in apostolic tradition and recorded in Holy Scripture,<sup>6</sup> embracing it as the final criterion by which claims about God’s identity and purposes made by theologians, mystics, philosophers, and other religions are to be interpreted, evaluated, and corrected. The particularities of supernatural revelation are not reduced to the more general content of creational revelation or natural theology. Religious experience is not accorded the status of special revelation.

According to the traditional view, therefore, our verbalization of the motherly qualities of God revealed in nature and apprehended in religious experience cannot share the foundational status of the language of supernatural revelation. At most Mother language can be supplemental in a secondary way. The God who mothers us and the whole creation is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, named by Jesus and witnessed in Scripture (Matt. 28:19). Questions about Dell’Olio’s arguments for Mother language arise because he does not rank and relate revelation and religious experience the traditional way but seems to regard natural revelation, supernatural revelation, and religious experience as roughly equal sources of language for God.

Dell’Olio affirms Scripture as revelation, but is hesitant to regard its naming of God as historically definitive. He warns against making

straightforward final appeals to the Bible regarding language for God because all interpretation is finite, fallible, self-interested, and liable to be patriarchal (p. 204) and because the Scriptures "are God's word revealed through human beings' evolving, and limited, historical consciousness" (p. 205). While these points warrant caution, generations of biblical interpreters have taken account of them but do not share Dell'Olio's reluctance to view Scripture as the final authority on the names of God.

He also reverses the traditional order between biblical language and philosophical theology when he appeals to God's ontological genderlessness as the standard by which to correct the masculine language of the biblical tradition, which allegedly promotes a "form of idolatry" (p. 205). In historic Christianity, awareness of God's transcendence moved the faithful to embrace Scripture as God's gracious verbal self-disclosure, not to relativize it. Accordingly, the church did not eliminate or augment the masculine language of God as Father even though it soon recognized that God is not ontologically masculine or male.<sup>7</sup> It used insights from philosophical theology to help interpret the language of Holy Scripture, to articulate what it means that the one ungendered God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but not to alter or replace biblical language, as inclusivism insists.

Dell'Olio's view of religious experience in relation to Scripture likewise seems to be more broad and egalitarian than the traditional view. He appeals to the experience of early Christian gnostics (p. 200, n.40) and Mary Baker Eddy (the founder of Christian Science), who are outside of the orthodox Christian tradition, as possible legitimating "initial baptisms" of "Mother" as a name for God (p. 200). Against Hook and Kimel, who would limit such legitimation to the witness of Scripture, he claims "there need only be some reference-fixing path from the names to God, regardless of how that reference originally got fixed" (p. 200).

Dell'Olio may be correct about the sheer linguistic possibility of referring to God in new ways. Someone could just stipulate that she will refer to the God Christians call "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" as "Ms. X" or "The Big Guy in the Sky." But what is linguistically possible is not necessarily legitimate. His unqualified appeal to experiential authorization seems to overlook the historic distinction between special revelation and post-canonical religious experience. This move not only places the God-talk (and therefore the theology) of the Gnostics and Mary Baker Eddy on the same level as that of Matthew, John, and Paul. By implication it also legitimates the Heavenly Father and Mother of Joseph Smith and the ontologically masculine-feminine God of Rev. Moon (Unification Church), alleged experiential revelations of God that likewise trace their reference-chains back to the Bible.

Christianity is rich with language for God that has come from philosophical reflection, religious experience, and the religious imagination: Great Designer, bright burning Tiger, and Hound of Heaven. But this language remains secondary to and defined by the language of the Bible. It is not the standard coin of Christian worship, piety, and faith. The same should hold for Mother language derived from natural revelation and religious experience.

### III. Feminine Language for God in Scripture

But Dell'Olio also invokes special revelation. He asserts that "there are numerous Biblical examples of the use of feminine language to describe God...which may then serve as a basis for the use of certain feminine terms (like 'mother') in connection with God since such terms are consistent with the feminine language that is used" (p. 195). To test his appeal we must examine both the number and linguistic status of the Bible's feminine references to God.

There are fewer than two dozen reasonably tenable feminine references to God in the Bible, all of them figures of speech, many of them implied or indirect, and most of them in the Old Testament.<sup>8</sup> Some inclusivists claim that there are many more instances that have been lost in translation or suppressed. Many argue that important divine names, such as "El Shaddai," and basic personal terms for God, such as "Spirit," are feminine. When subjected to standard exegesis, however, most of these assertions simply do not stand up.<sup>9</sup>

Dell'Olio provides an instructive example (p. 203), the common claim that Paul's sermon to the Athenian philosophers contains an image of God as a pregnant mother: "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). This suggestion might seem plausible until one discovers that the source of Paul's quote is a hymn to Zeus by Epimenides the Cretan<sup>10</sup> and was almost surely neither intended nor heard as a divine womb metaphor. Many inclusivist claims about feminine language for God in Scripture turn out like this one.

Nevertheless, there are genuine biblical feminine figures of speech for God. At issue is whether and how they present God as Mother. Dell'Olio writes: "if one finds maternal predicates ascribed to a subject, as is the case in certain Biblical descriptions of God, it would seem that one is within one's linguistic rights to refer to God as 'Mother'" (p. 197). His hypothesis may be true, but his conclusion is mistaken because his analysis of the original text and its figurative language is incomplete.

What is overlooked can be illustrated from his own repeated example, Deuteronomy 32:18: "you forgot the God who gave you birth" (NIV). It is true, as he claims, that the verb is properly translated "gave you birth" and therefore maternal in meaning. But that does not give us the right to infer that God, the subject, is Mother. For the grammatical form of this verb is masculine, reflecting that its subject is explicitly masculine. "God" is *El*, who is *Yahweh* ("the Lord" in verse 19; cf. "Father" in 6). In Hebrew these divine names are not only grammatically but also personally masculine. This is the case with all the divine names and standard personal titles in the Old and New Testaments.<sup>11</sup>

What we have in Deuteronomy 32:18 is actually a case of *cross-gender imagery*, a kind of trope in which a feature normally associated with one gender is figuratively predicated of a person of the other gender.<sup>12</sup> Other examples are "Saddam is the mother of all dictators," "Sally is bull-headed," Jesus as a mother hen (Matt. 23:37), nursing at the breasts of kings (Isa. 60:16 NRSV), and Paul in childbirth (Gal. 4:19). It turns out that all the feminine references to God in the Hebrew and Greek Bible are cross-gender images.<sup>13</sup>

Because they are cross-gender images, the feminine figures of speech in the Bible no more linguistically warrant "Mother" as a primary name or title for God and "She" as an appropriate pronoun than feminine imagery warrants these terms for Saddam, Jesus, or Paul. By Dell'Olio's own criterion, therefore, using "Mother" and "She" as linguistically equivalent to "Father" and "He" is not "within the linguistic rights" of inclusivists, since it is not "consistent with the feminine language that is used." However, biblical usage surely does warrant feminine language for God in a secondary, supplemental, figurative sense.

#### *IV. Names, Figures of Speech, and Language for God*

The distinction between names, titles, and appellatives on one hand and figures of speech on the other deserves further comment. Almost all discussions of gendered language for God fatally confuse two different meanings of "figurative" or "metaphorical" language: the "figurative" or "metaphorical" nature of human language generally in relation to the transcendence of God; and the distinction within language for God between the "figurative" or "metaphorical" parts of speech and the non-figurative parts of speech. What results is a completely fallacious argument from feminine imagery to feminine names for God.

The first meaning reflects the commonplace that our language cannot literally describe or define God as it does creatures since he transcends creaturely categories. Thus language for God is said to be "symbolic," "analogical," "metaphorical," "figurative," or something similar, and several theories of how language meaningfully refers to and asserts truth about God have been devised. Because of divine transcendence, "Father," "Lord," "King," and all the other biblical terms for God share this symbolic, analogical, figurative, or metaphorical quality.

It does not follow, however, (and here is the fallacy of equivocation) that "Yahweh" "God," "Father," "King," and the other primary biblical terms for God are metaphors or any other figure of speech in the second meaning of "figurative/metaphorical." Standard linguistic analysis classifies these terms as proper names, titles, and (non-figurative in this sense) predicate nouns or appellatives. Dell'Olio perpetuates this confusion by following Sally McFague's treatment of "Father" and "Mother" both as metaphors (pp. 196, 200).

Lack of clarity about names, titles, and metaphorical meaning also clouds his response to Hook and Kimel, who (correctly) classify "Father" in the New Testament as "a designating title...which functions like a proper name in its unique referentiality." Dell'Olio charges that their appeal to Kripke's view of a proper name as a rigid designator is confused because they regard "Father" as bearing metaphorical significance descriptive of God, whereas Kripke holds that "names are not descriptions" (p. 201).

But Kripke's view of proper names does not rule out their having descriptive meaning in addition to their essential function as rigid designators and is therefore consistent with Hook and Kimel's analysis of "Father." Hook and Kimel are working with a standard biblical and theological notion of "name" as a unique personal reference that (typically)

bears meaning, a definition that does not imply a strong distinction between a proper name and a title. Consider some examples: "Immanuel" is a name that means "God with us" (Matt. 1:23). In Isaiah 9:6 the name (*shem*) of the coming son of David is "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." A name (*onoma*) of Jesus Christ in Revelation 19:13 is "The Word of God" and in verse 16 his name is "King of kings and Lord of lords." Technically all of these cases are titles and are descriptive, but they are regarded as names in Scripture. The same is true of "Father," universally regarded in the theological tradition as the name (*nomen proprium*) of the First Person of the Trinity,<sup>14</sup> as well as the most personal title of the one God (1 Cor. 8:6).

Hook and Kimel are correct that there are no feminine names for God of this sort in Scripture. And we have indicated why there is no linguistic momentum in the Bible's feminine imagery that would accord "Mother" a status equal to "Father" as this sort of divine title or name. Adding "Mother" as a primary term for God to the biblical-traditional reference chain is therefore an arbitrary act unwarranted by the tradition of Scripture.

Furthermore, even if we could successfully refer to the God of the Bible by attaching "Mother" to the historical reference-chain, as Dell'Olio asserts, it cannot have equal status precisely because "Father" is not merely a rigid designator but the bearer of revelational meaning that "Mother" does not share. One definitive significance, for example, arises from the messianic covenant with David (2 Sam. 7:12-16), where God declares himself a father to David's royal sons forever. This messianic theme develops in the Old Testament (e.g., Ps. 2:6-7, Isa. 9:6-7) and culminates in God's Father-Son relationship with Jesus (e.g., Lk. 1:32). This theme is then explicated and refined into the Triune Name, invoked by Jesus himself and given to the church for all the world to acknowledge (Matt. 28:19). The feminine imagery of Scripture lacks this meaning as well as the linguistic function of personal designation. It simply cannot be equivalent to the Bible's primary (masculine) language.

#### V. Orthodoxy and Feminine Language for God

Prof. Dell'Olio questions whether biblical language is necessary for maintaining orthodoxy, responding specifically to the concern that Mother language leads to pantheism. He does not raise the equally important issue of trinitarian heterodoxy.

I agree that Mother-language does not imply heterodoxy in a conceptually or propositionally necessary way. But the traditionalists' point is not primarily that the propositional content of Mother-language is unequivocally pantheistic or that it entails heresy. They worry more that its personal and imaginative associations within the complex dynamics of human spirituality, unrestrained by supernatural revelation, push in the direction of heresy or false religion. They note a significant correlation in the world religions between mother goddesses and pantheism, paganism, and contemporary neo-paganism. They know that theologians who promote inclusive language for God frequently also hold kinds of pantheism that make God's involvement in the world part of the divine nature or neces-

sary for its self-realization.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, traditionalists note how frequently those who hold unorthodox doctrines of the Trinity and Christology (e.g., Gnostics, Shakers, Christian Science, Mormonism, and Moon's Unification theology) speak of the divine as both masculine and feminine. Whatever the spiritual-cultural-conceptual dynamics behind these correlations, opponents of inclusivism worry that the content of the faith would diminish in truthfulness if feminine language were given full equality in Scripture, the Creeds, the liturgy, and Christian discourse.

There is a way for users of feminine language to remain Christian in the biblical-traditional sense: simply to state up front that "Mother" refers to God as presented in Scripture and historically confessed by the church. This is the intention of many who use inclusive language. The crucial point, however, is that this approach implies a "supplementary but secondary" view of feminine language, acknowledging that the (masculine) language of Scripture and tradition is definitive of the meaning and doctrinal content of the Christian faith.

#### *VI. Idolatry, Sexism, and Biblical Language for God*

Dell'Olio agrees with Elizabeth Johnson that using only masculine language for God is both oppressive to women and idolatrous (p. 205). Traditional Christians must reject this allegation if only because it implies that the Bible and God himself, its primary author, are sexist and promote idolatry. A response is not difficult, because he commits the fallacy of confusing use and abuse, throwing out the baby of biblical language with the bath of idolatry and sexism. I claim that the language of Scripture is redemptive, not oppressive.

Inclusivists insist that feminine language for God and inclusion of women are necessarily correlative: they stand or fall together. A better approach to the problem of sexism in Christian tradition is to reject this correlation and return to the language of God and justice for humans as found in Scripture. According to the Old Testament, Elohim created male and female together in his image. Yahweh the King loves and demands justice for all, especially the poor and oppressed, widows and orphans. According to the New Testament, God Almighty promises to be a Father to his sons and daughters (2 Cor. 6:18). We all have the privileged status of children and heirs of God through Jesus Christ the Son, in whom there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28). Scripture's language for God is masculine and at the same time the Bible promotes general human equality, justice, and flourishing for men and women alike. (This claim can be defended whether or not Scripture allows the ordination of women, as I think it does.) Given the pattern of gendered language in Scripture, it is unnecessary and mistaken to make full inclusion of humans dependent upon inclusive language for God.<sup>16</sup>

Inclusivism seems more likely to be guilty of the sin of idolatry than the biblical-Christian tradition, if it consists in worshipping humanly constructed ideas about God instead of God as he has revealed himself. A better solution to the temptation of idolizing the masculinity of God is to remind ourselves what the church has always taught: the masculine lan-

guage for God in Scripture does not mean that God is ontologically masculine. In short, the abuses of biblical-traditional language for God are better addressed by a return to its proper use than by adopting egalitarian gender-inclusive language for God.

### VII. Conclusion

Questions about the nature and content of divine revelation and their relation to human religious practice have philosophical aspects and raise philosophical questions. But they are not primarily philosophical. We Christian philosophers need the help of ecclesiastically rooted biblical scholars, theologians, linguists, and liturgists to discuss the issues competently.

But even participation of scholars from other disciplines will probably not settle the debate. For we come from different parts of the Christian tradition and find ourselves at home with more traditional or more modern expressions of the faith and understandings of its sources and warrants. Even after thorough interdisciplinary discussion, we may not come to agreement on the nature and content of Holy Scripture or the status of the Nicene Creed or the weight of extra-biblical religious experience. And if we do not agree on these issues, we are unlikely to agree about appropriate language for God. My motive in responding to Prof. Dell'Olio is to make clearer some of the hermeneutical and theological issues that are unavoidably connected with inclusive language for God, whatever our personal conclusions.

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### NOTES

1. Andrew Dell'Olio, "Why Not God the Mother?" *Faith and Philosophy* 15 (1998), pp. 193-209. He claims to defend (p. 206 n. 3) Patricia Altenbernd Johnson's endorsement of gender inclusive language for God in "Feminist Christian Philosophy?" *Faith and Philosophy* 9 (1992), pp. 320-34, and he finds useful (p. 207 n. 10) George Isham's "Is God Exclusively a Father?" *Faith and Philosophy* 13 (April 1996), pp. 266-71. He criticizes the challenges to inclusive language made by William Harper, "On Calling God 'Mother'," *Faith and Philosophy* 11 (1994), pp. 290-97, and Donald Hook and Alvin Kimel, Jr., "Calling God 'Father': A Theolinguistic Analysis," *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (1995), pp. 207-222.

2. I develop this position in *Our Father in Heaven: Christian Faith and Inclusive Language for God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998).

3. Alvin Kimel, ed., *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) is the best collection of contemporary essays defending biblical-traditional language for God. Many of the authors—Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Lutheran, Reformed, and of other traditions—affirm a role for feminine language for God consistent with the pattern of Scripture. This position was occasionally practiced in Christian tradition. Julian of Norwich's several uses of feminine language for God (mainly for the Son) in her *Showings of Divine Love* are well known. Calvin used such language rarely, but did not

object to it in principle. Commenting on the (possible) maternal metaphor for God in Isaiah 46:3, he wrote "God...manifested himself to be both their Father and their Mother." *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, trans. W. Pringle, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), Vol. 3, pp. 436-37.

4. Avoiding gendered language altogether is also commonly recommended as a means of treating both genders equally. Following Dell'Olio, I will not address that inclusivist strategy.

5. Margo Houts, "Is God Also Our Mother?" *Perspectives* 12 (June-July 1997), pp. 8-12, distinguishes these positions as "hierarchical inclusivism" and "egalitarian inclusivism," rejecting the former. Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), pp. 47-57, considers and rejects several strategies for using feminine language for God in a secondary way and insists on full equality.

6. See "revelation," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 1392-93; and "God: Possibility of Knowledge of," *Handbook of Catholic Theology*, ed. W. Beinert and F. Schuessler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1995), pp. 284-85.

7. God's non-sexuality in relation to the meaning of the Father-Son language of the Trinity was defended and articulated, for example, by Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate*, 1, 4, and 18, and by Athanasius, *De Synodis*, 42. I owe these references to Roland Frye, "Language for God and Feminist Language," *Speaking the Christian God*, p. 20.

God's genderlessness is nowhere asserted in Scripture, although it does say that he does not have the form of man or woman (e.g., Deut. 4:15-16). This doctrine is inferred from such statements in Scripture, from the fact that God made both male and female in his image, and from the philosophical observation that gender is a correlative property incompatible with the simplicity and perfection of the divine nature.

8. See Cooper, "The Bible's Feminine and Maternal References to God," chapter three of *Our Father in Heaven*.

9. Some inclusivists state as fact that El Shaddai means "Breasted God." This idea has been most fully defended by David Biale, "The God with Breasts: El Shaddai in the Bible," *History of Religions* 20/3 (February 1982), pp. 240-56. Biale openly admits that his case is almost entirely hypothetical. It is based on tenuous etymology, that the epithet-name "Shaddai" comes from the word for "breast," and speculative historiography, that the priestly redactors assimilated Shaddai, a hypothetical ancient mother god, into El in order to incorporate popular Israelite Asherah worship into Yahwism. This imaginative construction is vastly less likely than the reasons for the Septuagint tradition's translation of El Shaddai as "God Almighty."

Some inclusivists claim that, since "spirit" (*ruach*) is usually grammatically feminine in Hebrew, Old Testament references to God's Spirit carry personal feminine nuances. But this is false because the Old Testament attributes "spirit" to God the same ways it does to humans ("the spirit of the Lord" and "the spirit of Moses"), and in the case of humans its grammatical gender does not reflect personal gender. "The spirit of Moses" does not connote Moses' feminine side. The point is moot in the Septuagint and New Testament because the Greek term *pneuma* is neuter. (The relation between grammatical and personal gender in the biblical languages is somewhat different than in German, to which Dell'Olio appeals on p. 201.)

10. See for example, F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 359- 60. Paul's other quote, "for we are his offspring," is from a poem about Zeus by Aratus.

11. See Cooper, "The Bible's Masculine Language for God," chapter four in

*Our Father in Heaven*. El is the patriarchal high God in ancient near eastern religion, also referred to as Elohim in the Old Testament. Yahweh, the special name revealed to Moses, is probably the third masculine singular form of I AM, that is, "He Is." See Barry Bandstra, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1995), p. 120. Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is*, pp. 241-45, completely overlooks the Hebrew etymology when attempting to argue that Yahweh should be understood as "She Who Is." However, the masculinity of God in the biblical text does not imply that God is ontologically masculine.

12. See Al Wolters, "Cross-Gender Imagery in the Bible," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 8 (1998), pp. 217-28.

13. See Cooper, "Cross Gender Imagery for God" in *Our Father in Heaven*, chapter five. Some, as in Deuteronomy 32:18, Job 38:29, and Psalm 90:2, are birth metaphors. Others, such as Isaiah 42:14, 49:15, and 66:13, are similes in which God (Elohim or Yahweh) is said to be like a mother in some way. In all cases of feminine imagery, the subject name or title for God in the original language is grammatically and personally masculine.

14. See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I. 33. 2: "the proper name [*nomen proprium*] of a person signifies that whereby the person is distinguished from all other persons...Hence this name *Father*, whereby paternity is signified, is the proper name of the person of the Father."

15. John Cobb and David Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), pp. 9-10 and 61-62, emphasize that their dipolar theology cuts against the traditional view of God as "exclusively male" in favor of a balanced masculine-feminine view. The panentheistic theologies of Sally McFague and Rosemary Ruether also come to mind. See McFague, "God and the World," in *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), pp. 59-90, where she follows process theology in viewing the world as "God's body." And see Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1983), pp. 48-49 and 86-92, where she designates God/ess as "Primal Matrix" [*matrix* from *mater*, Latin for "mother"].

16. It is surely legitimate to wonder why God revealed himself in exclusively masculine language. Defenders of biblical language sometimes hypothesize that this language is essential to a proper understanding of the Creator-creature relation or of the Trinity, or perhaps that it is God's best strategy for communicating in a sinful patriarchal world. But these are only pious guesses. In the end Christians accept this language because it is God's self-naming, not because we understand and approve of God's reasons for it. Surely there is no injustice to humans in how God has revealed himself, and there is no incompatibility between the divine names and justice among humans.