Theology Matters

A Publication of Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry Vol 12 No 3 • May/Jun 2006

The Trinity paper to this year's General Assembly raised the issue again of whether it is appropriate to use inclusive God-language rather than Father, Son and Holy Spirit when addressing God. These articles will be helpful to you in that on-going discussion of whether we can use other names for God including female names.

Exchanging God for "No Gods": A Discussion of Female Language for God

By Elizabeth Achtemeier

No aspect of the feminist movement has affected the church's life more basically than has that movement's attempts to change the language used in speaking to or about God. Beginning with the introduction of the first volume of the National Council of Churches' *An Inclusive Language Lectionary*[1] in 1983, inclusive language has steadily made its way into the Scriptures, prayers, liturgies, hymns, and publications of the mainline churches, largely through the instrumentality of those churches' denominational headquarters and often to the dismay of the laity in the pews.

The argument of the feminists is that women have been oppressed in the church since the second century and that the language of the church has fostered that oppression. For example, by the use of generic terms such as *man* and *mankind*, males have come to be seen as the definition of what it means to be human. And by the use of masculine titles and pronouns for God, maleness has been absolutized and males thereby given the right to rule over females. "Since God is male," Mary Daly says, "the male is God."[2] Therefore, claims Anne E. Carr, "God as father rules over the world, holy fathers rule over the church, clergy fathers over laity, males over females, husbands over wives and children, man over the created world."[3] Such a hierarchical worldview must be abolished, say the feminists, and one way to do that is by changing our language.

There can be no doubt that in many respects the women have a just cause. They have suffered discrimination in the church for centuries. They have been denied leadership roles and respect for their learning and persons. They have even been labeled by fundamentalist Southern Baptists as the source of sin in the world. They have been denied ordination by the Roman Catholic Church because they do not biologically "resemble Christ." That discrimination continues today, with the Bible misused as its instrument.

There also can be no doubt that such discrimination is a corruption and fundamental denial of the Christian gospel. The Scriptures clearly proclaim that both female and male are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), that

Elizabeth Achtemeier, now deceased, was adjunct professor of Bible and Homiletics at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, VA.

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husband and wife are to join flesh in a marital union of mutual helpfulness (Gen. 2:18), that the ancient enmity between the sexes and the subordination of women are a result of human sin (Gen. 3), that such sinful enmity and subordination have been overcome by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:28), and that all women and men alike are called to equal discipleship in the service of their risen Lord. The Scriptures further show that our Lord consistently treated women as equals and that the New Testament churches could have women as their leaders. Thus, when one encounters those few instances in the New Testament in which women are made subject to the rule of men, as in 1 Corinthians 14, two of the Pastoral Letters, and the household codes, one must apply the Reformation's principle of letting the Scriptures interpret the Scripture. If that is done, it becomes clear that the subordination of women was historically limited to specific situations within some of the early house churches, and that the gospel of Jesus Christ is a ringing proclamation of freedom under God, for both females and males. For the church to claim or act otherwise is a denial of its gospel.

It therefore seems only fair for the feminists in the church to ask that the church's language about *human beings* be changed to include them, so that males no longer define humanity. The new 1990 edition of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible has acceded to that request, and in it, generic English terms have been changed to reflect the meaning of the original texts. For example, John 12:32 now reads, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people [rather than 'men'] to myself."

There is, however, a great difference between feminism as fairness and feminism as ideology, as Richard John Neuhaus has cogently pointed out,[4] and it is in relation to language *about God* that the feminists are most radically ideological. By attempting to change the biblical language used of the deity, the feminists have in reality exchanged the true God for those deities which are "no gods," as Jeremiah would put it (2:11).

The feminist claim is that all language about God is analogical and metaphorical, and that therefore it can be changed at will to overcome the church's patriarchalism and to foster women's liberation. Principally, therefore, the feminists seek to eliminate all masculine terminology used of God, either by supplementing it with feminine terminology or by using neuter or female images for the deity exclusively.

In speaking of God and Christ, some simply use "she" and "her."[5] For the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, others substitute *Creator*, *Liberator*, and *Comforter*,[6] and they avoid the excessive use of terms such as *Father*, *King*, and *Master* by often substituting *Yahweh* or *God* or *Abba*.[7] In *An Inclusive Language Lectionary,* the Bible's use of *Father* is changed to *Father* (and *Mother*), *Lord* to *Sovereign, King* to *Ruler* or *Monarch*, *Son of Man* to *Human One*, *Son of God* to *Child of God*. Rosemary Radford Ruether consistently calls her deity *God/ess*,[8] while Rita Gross uses *God-She*.[9] Others apply feminine usage only to the Holy Spirit or avoid the problem altogether by using impersonal terms for God such as *Wisdom, Glory, Holy One, Rock. Fire*, and *First and Last,* or neuter terms like *Liberator, Maker, Defender, Friend*, and *Nurturer*. Jesus is described as a male only in his earthly life, while he becomes Liberator, Redeemer, and Savior in his representation of the new humanity.[10]

Those who employ such changes in the biblical usage try to justify them by pointing to female imagery for God in the Bible or by claiming that the Catholic cult of Mary furnishes a tradition of female language and imagery in speaking of the divine. "If we do not mean that God is male when we use masculine pronouns and imagery," asks Rita Gross, "then why should there be any objections to using female imagery and pronouns as well?" She continues, "Female God language compels us to overcome the idolatrous equation of God with androcentric notions of humanity in a way that no other linguistic device can."[11]

Many things need to be said in reply. First, it is universally recognized by biblical scholars that the God of the Bible has no sexuality. Sexuality is a structure of creation (cf. Gen. 1-2), confined within the limits of the creation (cf. Matt. 22:30), and the God of the Bible is consistently pictured as totally other than all creation. This is what the Bible means when it says that God is "holy"—he is "set apart," totally other than anything he has made. "I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst," he says in Hosea (11:9); "The Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses are flesh, and not spirit" is Isaiah's word (31:3). "To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?" asks the Second Isaiah (40:18). Thus, by insisting on female language for God, the feminists simply continue to emphasize the nonbiblical view that God does indeed have sexuality. In fact, some of them have misused the biblical concept of the *imago dei* to say that God must be female as well as male, since both sexes are made in God's image (Gen. 1:27). That is a total distortion of the biblical understanding of God, who is without sexual characteristics.

Second, as Roland Frye has amply demonstrated,[12] the few instances of feminine imagery for God in the Bible all take the form of a simile and not of a metaphor, and that distinction is crucial. A simile compares one aspect of something to another. For example, in Isaiah 42:14, God will "cry out *like* a woman in travail," but only his *crying out* is being referred to; he is not being identified as a whole with the figure of a woman in childbirth. In metaphors, on the other hand, identity between the subject and the thing compared to it is assumed. God *is* Father, or Jesus *is* the Good Shepherd, or God *is* King. Thus the metaphor "carries a word or phrase far beyond its ordinary lexical meaning so as to provide a fuller and more direct understanding of the subject."[13] Language is stretched to its limit, beyond ordinary usage, to provide new understanding.

Third, the Bible uses masculine language for God because that is the language with which God has revealed himself. The biblical, Christian faith is a revealed religion. It claims no knowledge of God beyond the knowledge God has given of himself through his words and deeds in the histories of Israel and of Jesus Christ and his church. In fact, it is quite certain that human beings, by searching out God, cannot find him. Unless God reveals himself, he remains unknown to humanity. Unlike every other religion of the world, the Judeo-Christian faith (imitated by Islam) does not start with the phenomena of the world and deduce the nature of God from them; in this respect, the biblical religions are unique in history. Rather, the Judeo-Christian faith itself is the product of God's self-revelation within time and space to a chosen people, and apart from that self-revelation, biblical faith has no language for or experience of the divine. In short, only God can reveal himself.

But the God of the Bible has revealed himself. Contrary to those modern theologies (cf. that of Sallie McFague) which claim that God is the great Unknown and that therefore human beings must invent language for God that can then be changed at will, the God of the Bible has revealed himself in five principal metaphors as King, Father, Judge, Husband, and Master, and finally, decisively, as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we ask "What is the ontological nature of God?" we must reply "God is the Father of Jesus Christ." As Alvin Kimel explains,

> God is not just like a father; he is *the* Father. Jesus is not just like a son; he is *the* Son. The divine Fatherhood and Sonship are absolute, transcendent, and correlative.... The relationship between Christ Jesus and his Father, lived out in the conditions of first-century Palestine and eternally established in the resurrection and ascension of our Lord, belongs to the inner life of God. It constitutes the identity of the Almighty Creator…. "Father" is not a metaphor imported by humanity onto the screen of eternity; it is a name and filial term of address *revealed* by God himself in the person of his Son.... No matter how other groups of human beings may choose to speak to the Deity, the matter is already decided for Christians, decided by God himself. To live in Christ in the triune being of the Godhead is to worship and adore the holy Transcendence whom Jesus knows as his Father.[14]

If one believes that Jesus Christ is the Word of God made flesh, the Son of God incarnate in time and space—a belief that feminists such as Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Rosemary Radford Ruether and a host of others would deny—then there is no contradiction that can be made to the particularity of God's self-revelation. God is not just any god, capable of being named according to human fancy. No, God is the one whom Jesus reveals as his Father

The same particularity obtains in the Old Testament. Once again, God is not to be identified with just any god. For this reason, the central commandment in the Bible, first contained in Deuteronomy 6:4, begins with, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord." That is, the God of Israel is not identical with the diffuse numina known to other peoples but is one particular God who has done particular things in particular times and places. Principally, he is "the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exod. 20:2 and throughout the Old Testament). If Israel asks who God is, the reply is that he is the God of the Exodus. And it is that God of the Exodus, then, whom Jesus also reveals to be his Father (cf. Mark 12:29-30). God defines himself in the Bible, through centuries of acting and speaking in the life of his covenant people, and it is only through that self-revelation, now handed down to us in the Scriptures, that we have any knowledge of him.

Surely several questions arise, however, and the first is this: Why does God reveal himself primarily in personal terms? If God has no sexuality, if he is Spirit (cf. John 4:24), then why does he not name himself through the media of impersonal metaphorical language? Why are not his primary designations those of Rock, Fire, Living Water, Bread, Way, Door, Refuge, Fortress, and other such metaphors that can be found throughout the Scriptures? Put another way, why does the Bible insist on those awkward anthropomorphisms for God, in which he is described as having hands and feet and mouth like a person, and which are finally brought to their ultimate anthropomorphism in the incarnation of Jesus Christ? Why a personal God when God transcends all human personality?

One answer is that a God named primarily Rock or Way or Door does not demand that we do anything. All of those impersonal metaphors for God in the Bible are encompassed within a principal revelation of God as supremely personal, because the God of the Bible meets us Person to person and asks from us the total commitment of our personalities: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5); "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). God asks of us primarily love in return for his love that was manifested in his dealings with us: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (Hos. 11:1); "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16). No impersonal designations of God, except they be explained by the Bible's personal names for him, can adequately express that gracious and demanding relationship of love with himself into which God woos and calls us.

More pressing for the feminists, however, is the question of why God reveals himself only in masculine terms. Elaine Pagels is quite correct when she states that "the absence of feminine symbolism of God marks Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in striking contrast to the world's other religious traditions, whether in Egypt, Babylonia, Greece and Rome, or Africa, Polynesia, India, and North America."[15] But why could a personal God not have revealed himself in feminine metaphors instead? God is never called "Mother" in the Bible and is never addressed or thought of as a female deity. That was unique in the

ancient Near Eastern world; Israel was surrounded by peoples who worshiped female deities—Asherat and Anat, Nut and Isis, Tiamat and the Queen of Heaven, Demeter and Artemis. And such a masculinizing of the deity is still unique in our world.

The feminist argument is that the names for God in the Bible have been determined by the patriarchal cultures out of which the Bible arose, but that argument founders on the revelation in Jesus Christ, as we have seen. Feminists have a very difficult time with God the Father and God the Son, although some of them hold that the feminine element is introduced by the Holy Spirit, even though the Spirit too proceeds from the Father and from the Son and is one with them. No, the Bible's language for God is masculine, a unique revelation of God in the world.

The basic reason for that designation of God is that the God of the Bible will not let himself be identified with his creation, and therefore human beings are to worship not the creation but the Creator (cf. Rom. 1:25). In the words of the Decalogue, we are not to worship "anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them" (Exod. 20:4-5; Deut. 5:8-9), because the God of the Bible is sharply distinguished from everything that he has made. To be sure, God works in his creation through the instruments of his Word and Spirit; he orders his creation and sustains it; he constantly cares for it; but he is never identified with it. And it is that holiness, that otherness, that transcendence of the Creator, which also distinguishes biblical religion from all others.

In most of the cultures of the world, deity and world are not differentiated. Rather, the divine is bound up with and revealed through the natural world. For example, in ancient Mesopotamia, the gods and goddesses were thought to emanate out of chaotic matter. And indeed, not only the Babylonians but also the Egyptians and Greeks and Romans saw in the manifestations of nature the life and activity of their deities. The expanse of the sky, the heat of the sun, the growth and death of vegetation, the fury of the storm—these were to those ancient peoples not impersonal happenings and objects but cosmic Thous which affected human life and demanded adjustment to them. Nature was alive for primitive peoples (as it still is for many today). Its changes were attributed to divine will, its conflicts to the struggles of opposing gods and goddesses. Its harmony was thought to be the result of the organization of the cosmic, divine state, as in Mesopotamian theology, or its harmony was said to stem from the genealogical relationships of the deities, as in Hesiod's *Theogony*. God and world were seen as one. Deity was believed to be revealed through all persons and things, and was therefore to be met through the phenomena of the natural world. In the worship of the biblical Canaanites, any natural object could be a medium of revelation—a stone pillar, a sacred grove, a stream—just as in the worship of Mesopotamia the heavenly bodies were thought to be deities (cf. King Josiah's destruction of such objects of pagan worship in 2 Kings 23:4-14).

It is precisely the introduction of female language for God that opens the door to such identification of God with the world, however. If God is portrayed in feminine language, the figures of carrying in the womb, of giving birth, and of suckling immediately come into play. For example, feminist Virginia Mollenkott writes of the God of Naomi in the book of Ruth as "the God with Breasts," "the undivided One God who births and breast-feeds the universe.''[16] The United Church of Christ's Book of Worship prays, "You have brought us forth from the womb of your being." A feminine goddess has given birth to the world! But if the creation has issued forth from the body of the deity, it shares in deity's substance; deity is in, through, and under all things, and therefore everything is divine. Holding such a worldview, Mollenkott can say that "our milieu" is "divine,"[17] just as Zsuzsanna E. Budapest can go even further and write, "This is what the Goddess symbolizes—the divine within women and all that is female in the universe.... The responsibility you accept is that you are divine, and that you have power."[18] If God is identified with his creation, we finally make ourselves gods and goddesses—the ultimate and primeval sin, according to Genesis 3 and the rest of the Scriptures.

But we can never rightly understand ourselves and our place in the universe, the Bible tells us, until we realize that we are not gods and goddesses. Rather, we are creatures, wondrously and lovingly made by a sovereign Creator: "It is he that made us, and not we ourselves" (Ps. 100:3). The Bible will use no language which undermines that confession. It therefore eschews all feminine language for God that might open the door to such error, and it is rigorous in its opposition to every other religion and cultic practice that identifies creation with creator.

The principal fight of Deuteronomy, of the Deuteronomic History (Deuteronomy through 2 Kings), and of the prophets is with Canaanite baalism and with Mesopotamian astral worship, in which God has been identified with his world; the New Testament implicitly endorses the separation of creation and Creator by carefully stating that before there was the creation, there was the Word and the Word was God (John 1:1). Indeed, prophets and psalmists and the New Testament are quite certain that the world may pass away, but God will not pass away, because God and his world are not one (Ps. 46:1-2; 102:25-27; Isa. 51:6; 54:10; Mark 13:31 and parallels).

No passage in Scripture more carefully preserves the understanding of God's otherness from his creation than does Genesis 1, a chapter that is the product of centuries of theological reflection. At first glance, it would seem that the priestly authors of Genesis 1 share the mythopoeic worldview of Mesopotamia, in which God is identified with his creation, because they borrow some of the language of that Mesopotamian view: God creates by bringing order into the primeval chaos, the great deep or *tehom,* which is the linguistic equivalent of the Babylonian Tiamat, the goddess of chaos. And the earth and the firmament are created from the chaos, as they are in the

Babylonian story. But while the priestly writers use the language of their time, they carefully alter and demythologize it. In the Babylonian epic, the gods emanate out of the primeval chaos and therefore share common substance with the creation; in Genesis 1, God is above and beyond creation as its sovereign Lord. In the Babylonian story, the god Marduk must fight with the goddess of chaos, Tiamat; in Genesis, there is only one God, and he speaks to effortlessly bring about the universe. In the Babylonian account, creation takes place in the timeless realm of the divine; in the Bible, it is the beginning of the sacred history. In Babylonian theology, then, nature, which reflects the life of the divine, gives a cyclical pattern to human history—the cyclical pattern of its continual round of birth and life and death; in the Bible, the pattern for human history is linear, and both human beings and nature are subject to a time different from their own—namely, to God's time, to salvation history, which has a beginning and an end.

God, the biblical writers are saying, is in no way contained in or bound up with or dependent on or revealed through his creation. God creates the world outside of himself, by the instrument of his Word. Between God and his world stands the Word of God (cf. John 1:2), which always addresses the creation as an object of the divine speech (cf. Isa. 1:2; 40:22, 26; Mic. 6:2 et al.). The world does not emanate out of the being of God or contain some part of him within it. He has not implanted divinity within any part of the creation, not even in human beings, and therefore no created thing or person can be claimed to be divine.

The assurance and meaning that this biblical understanding of the Creator's relation to his creation give to faith, then, are profoundly important. First, because God is not bound up with his creation, that means that heaven and earth may pass away—we may blow the earth off its axis at the push of the nuclear button—but the eternal God is able to take those who love him into an everlasting fellowship with himself that does not pass away (cf. Ps. 102:25-27; Isa. 51:6; Mark 13:31 and parallels). In this nuclear age the person of biblical faith can therefore lead a life not of fear and anxiety but of joy and certain hope in God's eternal salvation (cf. Ps. 46:1-3).

Second, because God is not bound up with nature's cycle but stands above and beyond its spiral and subjects it to the linear time of his purpose (cf. Rom. 8:19-23; Isa. 11:6-9 et al.), the pattern for human life is no longer that of nature's endless round of becoming and passing away but becomes a joyful pilgrimage toward God's goal of his kingdom.

The feminists, who want to make Creator and creation one, should realize that there is no meaning to human life if it is patterned after and subjected to nature's round. As Ecclesiastes puts it, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.... A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains for ever.... What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; and there is nothing new under the sun" (1:2, 4, 9). Such a cyclical understanding of human history was the classical understanding until the time of Darwin, when it was seen that nature not only repeated itself but also evolved in newness. In many philosophies, the cycle of nature therefore came to be viewed as a spiral, to allow for the introduction of novelty. Nevertheless, nature's round remained the pattern for human life. That means, then, that a mother may painstakingly raise her children, who grow up and raise more children, who in turn grow up and raise their offspring, and each generation passes away in its time, ad infinitum. No goal is given to living. Each generation is born and suffers and dies, and human life does indeed become "a tale told by an idiot…signifying nothing."

Realizing that a cyclical understanding of human history results in meaninglessness, every nonbiblical religion and philosophy in the world has tried to escape that emptiness. In India and China, the goal of life is to escape the cycle of history into the timeless realm of Nirvana, a solution which implies that our everyday life has no meaning. In the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, the escape from history is rational, and human beings take refuge from the circle of life by retreating into the realm of pure form. In modern philosophies, such as those of Nietzsche and Spengler, the only alternative is nobly to assert, if finally futilely, individual freedom. In Nietzsche, this leads to suicide, in Spengler to a form of fatalism. But whatever the escape sought, not one of these positions is positive, no one of them holding that the common life we live on this earth in time has any meaning.

Such too is the view of history in some forms of modern existentialism and in that branch of modern drama known as the theater of the absurd. In Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*, for example, no action takes place because the message is that all action is meaningless. Life goes around in a circle and finally means nothing. History is an endless repetition of events, having no goal or purpose.

Such meaninglessness results from a theology that identifies God with his creation. And that identification almost automatically comes about when feminine language for God is used. Many feminists have argued that feminine language for God does not necessarily lead to the deity's identification with creation. But feminist writings themselves demonstrate that it does.

We have already seen such a demonstration from the writings of Virginia Mollenkott. It can perhaps most clearly be shown from the works of Rosemary Radford Ruether, who could be called the leading feminist writer in the United States today. Ruether wants to use female language for God, and therefore she names the divine God/ess. But Ruether, like all of the feminist writers, does not want her deity to rule over her: as I said at the beginning, feminists want to get rid of a hierarchical view in which God is their Lord. God for them must be not a Sovereign but a "friend" (Sallie McFague) or a "householder" (Letty Russell) or the power of love-in-

relation (Isabel Carter Heyward, Dorothee Solle). Ruether therefore defines her God/ess as the Primal Matrix, as "the great womb within which all things, gods and humans, sky and earth, human and nonhuman beings are generated"—an image, she rightly says, which survives in the metaphor of the divine as the Ground of Being[19] (cf. Tillich). But this is no mere image or metaphor for Ruether. This God/ess is divine reality: "…the empowering Matrix; She, in whom we live and move and have our being.... She comes; She is here."[20]

For Ruether, then, this God/ess is very much bound up with nature's life, and therefore in her book entitled *Women-Church* Ruether can write liturgies for worshiping groups of females that celebrate the cycles of the moon, the solstices and the seasons, as well as the cycles of menstruation and menopause and other changes in women's lives. We "reappropriate the hallowing of nature and cyclical time of ancient pre-Judeo-Christian traditions,"[21] she says, just as Sheila Collins, in her work, maintains that "the exclusivity of the linear view of history dissolves.... The cyclical view of history becomes once again a possibility."[22] We "reclaim our true relationship with somatic reality, with body and earth," writes Ruether, "and with the Great Goddess that sustains our life in nature."[23] That is clearly a return to the worldview of Canaanite baalistic and Mesopotamian pagan theologies. Indeed, Ruether draws on the language of the latter. To celebrate menstruation, Ruether instructs the female in women-church to descend into a ritual bath, which "is seen as a descent into the primal sea [read 'Tiamat'] from which all things emerged in the original creation."[24]

The result is that Ruether and all those feminists who want to erase the distinction between God and his creation finally share with the most radical feminists, who have abandoned the Christian church and faith altogether, a view of divinity that is at home in modern witches' covens. Writes Starhawk, a self-proclaimed Wicca worshiper,

> There is no dichotomy between spirit and flesh, no split between God-head and the world. The Goddess is manifest in the world; she brings life into being, is Nature, is flesh. Union is not sought outside the world in some heavenly sphere or through dissolution of the self into the void beyond the senses. Spiritual union is found in life, within nature, passion, sensuality—through being fully human, fully one's self.
>
> Our great symbol for the Goddess is the moon, whose three aspects reflect the three stages in women's lives and whose cycles of waxing and waning coincide with women's menstrual cycles....
>
> The Goddess is also earth—Mother Earth, who sustains all growing things, who is the body, our bones and cells. She is air…fire…water…mare, cow, cat, owl, crane, flower, tree, apple, seed, lion, sow, stone, woman. She is found in the world around us, in the cycles and seasons of nature, and in mind, body, spirit, and the emotions within each of us. Thou art Goddess. I am Goddess. All that lives (and all that is, lives), all that serves life, is Goddess.[25]

Such statements serve as a vivid summary of the end result of a religion in which Creator and creation are undivided. And if female language for the deity is used, such beliefs are its logical outcome.

When such views are held, meaninglessness haunts human life. Perhaps that meaninglessness can be most poignantly illustrated by Ruether's views of death. There is no eternal life for those of faith in Ruether's female God/ess religion. Rather, the end she envisions for all of us and our communities is that we will simply end up as compost:

> In effect [at death], our existence ceases as individuated ego/organism and dissolves back into the cosmic matrix of matter/energy, from which new centers of individuation arise. It is this matrix, rather than our individuated centers of being, that is "everlasting," that subsists underneath the coming to be and passing away of individuated beings and even planetary worlds. Acceptance of death, then, is acceptance of the finitude of our individuated centers of being, but also our identification with the larger matrix as our total self that contains us all.... To the extent to which we have transcended egoism for relation to community, we can also accept death as the final relinquishment of individuated ego into the great matrix of being.[26]

Such a view finally means that there is no purpose for the creation of each individual human being, and that my life and yours in our communities have no eternal meaning beyond their brief and transitory appearances on this earth.

If God and creation are identified with one another, perhaps most disturbing of all is the feminists' claim to embody the deity within themselves—in other words, to be divine. "I found God in myself and I loved her fiercely," exults Carol Christ:[27] that is the logical result of a religion in which the deity is believed to be contained in all things and all persons, and feminists who hold such views then become a law unto themselves. Indeed, for feminists Dorothee Solle and Isabel Carter Heyward, there is no such thing as original sin, and the "fall" of Genesis 3 is good, a liberation into knowledge and action and reliance on one's self.[28] "We do not have to sit around all year singing, with Luther, 'Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing,' " writes Solle. No, "we are strong; we can accomplish things."[29] According to Solle, God is unnecessary: "To live, we do not need what has repeatedly been called 'God,' a power that intervenes, rescues, judges, and confirms. The most telling argument against our traditional God is not that he no longer exists or that he has drawn back within himself but that we no longer need him."[30]

God is in us, maintains Solle, as our capacity to love. We are one with God in a mystical relation. We do not serve God; we manifest him:

> In the mystical tradition, there is no room for deferring to a higher power, for worshiping alien rule, and for denying our own strength. On the contrary, mystical texts often explicitly criticize the master-servant relationship....
>
> Here, religion is a sense of unity with the whole, a sense of belonging, not of submitting. We do not honor God because of his power over us; we immerse ourselves in him, in his love.... He is, as Meister Eckhart says, the fundament, love, the depths, the sea. Symbols from nature are preferred where our relationship with God is not one of obedience but of unity, where we are not subject to the commands of some remote being that demands sacrifice and the relinquishing of the self, but rather where we are asked to become one with all of life.[31]

And so, for Solle, because God is in us, all we need is love. That is the central idea in the Bible, she maintains:

> The tradition has added Christology and ecclesiology to it, the virgin birth, the resurrection and the ascension, the Trinity, original sin, and eternity.... I do not think we can restore this ... house of language. I think we will have to abandon it in the condition it is in and build a new one on this simple foundation: All you need is love.[32]

To the contrary, however, in a world where human torture is the rule in most prisons, where a person on a subway platform in New York City can push a woman in front of an oncoming train "just for the hell of it," where little children in a nursery school can be tied up and sexually abused, where whole races can be uprooted or starved to death or burnt up in gas ovens, it must be said that Solle's is a naive understanding indeed, and that we do in fact need a Power greater than human evil—or, for that matter, a Power greater than even the highest human love and good, for it was the best religion and the best law that erected the cross on Golgotha. If there is not a God who is Lord over life, who "intervenes, rescues, judges, and confirms," and who has given his final judgment and won his decisive victory in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, then human evil will always have the last word and there is no hope for this world. The feminists, believing themselves divine, think that by their own power they can restructure society, restore creation, and overcome suffering. But the tortured history of humanity testifies to what human beings do when they think they are a law unto themselves with no responsibility to God, and those feminists who are claiming that God is in them will equally fall victim to human sin.

The God of the Judeo-Christian biblical faith is holy God, the almighty Creator and Lord, totally other than everything and everyone he has made. We therefore cannot know and worship him unless he reveals himself to us. But with a love surpassing human understanding, he has revealed himself to us as the Holy One of Israel, who delivered her out of the house of bondage, and as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In that revelation, now mediated for us through the Scriptures, he has offered to adopt us as his beloved children (cf. John 1:12; Gal. 4:4-7), to allow us to call him Father, *Abba* (cf. Rom. 8:14-17), and to know him as his Son Jesus Christ knows him. If in trust and obedience we accept that offering of himself to us, he promises to be with us all our lives long, to guide us in the paths of righteousness, to give us joy in the midst of the world's tribulation, to unite us in communities of love and peace with like-minded believers, to send us out to perform tasks that will give meaning to all our lives, and finally, at death, to receive us into his realm of eternal life and good that cannot pass away. For my part, I can imagine no reason ever to reject such a God or to exchange him for those deities of earth that are "no gods." Women suffer discrimination, yes; our world is full of all kinds of evil. But God is holy, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and by faith in him we shall always be more than conquerors, and nothing shall ever separate us from the love he has for us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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[2] Daly, "The Qualitative Leap Beyond Patriarchal Religion," *Quest* (Women and Spirituality) 1 (1974): 21.
[3] Carr, *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience (*San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 51.
[4] Neuhaus, "The Feminist Faith," *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life* 2 (April 1990): 60.
[5] See Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), pp. 345, 347.
[6] Letty M. Russell, *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective--A Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 102.
[7] Letty M. Russell, "Changing Language and the Church," in *The Liberating Word: A Guide to Non-sexist Interpretation of the Bible,* ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 92.
[8] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983).
[9] See Gross, "Female God Language in a Jewish Context," in *Womenspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion,* ed. Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), p.173.
[10] Russell, "Changing Language and the Church," p. 93.
[11] Gross, "Female God Language in a Jewish Context," pp.170, 171-172.
[12] Frye, "Language for God and Feminist Language: Problems and Principles" (Princeton: Center of Theological Inquiry, 1988).
[13] Ibid., p. 18.
[14] Kimel, *A New Language for God? A Critique of Supplemental Liturgical Texts--Prayer Book Studies 30* (Shaker Heights, Ohio: Episcopalians United, 1990), pp.11-12.
[15] Pagels, "What Became of God the Mother? Conflicting Images of God in Early Christianity," in *Womenspirit Rising, p.107.*
[16] Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Image of God as Female* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), p. 58.
[17] Ibid., p.109.
[18] Budapest, "Self-Blessing Ritual," in *Womanspirit Rising, pp. 271-272.*
[19] Ruether*, Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 48-49.
[20] Ibid., p. 266.
[21] Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), p.104.
[22] Collins, "Reflections on the Meaning of Herstory," in *Womenspirit Rising,* p.70.
[23] Ruether, *Women-Church*, p. 108.
[24] Ibid., p. 219.
[25] Starhawk, "Witchcraft and Women's Culture," in *Womanspirit Rising,* p. 263.
[26] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* pp. 257-58.
[27] Christ, 'Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological and Political Reflections, " in *Womenspirit Rising,* p. 277.
[28] See Solle, *The Strength of the Weak: Towards a Christian Feminist Identity,* trans. Robert and Rita Kimber (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 126-29; and Heyward, *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation* (New York: University Press of America, 1982), pp. 150-52.
[29] *The Strength of the Weak,* p. 158.
[30] Ibid., p. 137.
[31] Ibid., p. 102.
[32] bid., pp. 133-34.

The God Who Likes His Name: Holy Trinity, Feminism, and the Language of Faith

By Alvin F. Kimel, Jr.

How to name God? This question has been acutely put to the American churches in the past decade by feminist theologians, and with profound effect. Substantive changes in the language of faith are now taking place: the triune name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is routinely ignored; baptisms are occurring in the names of inclusive substitutes; liturgies are composed that omit references to God as Father or Jesus as the Son, some of which directly address God as Mother and other feminine titles; the masculine pronoun for the deity is said to be inappropriate usage. Important reasons and theologies are advanced to justify these changes. The thesis of this essay is that these changes must result in an alienation from the gospel. The particularities of the biblical revelation that are now so offensive to contemporary sensibility are at the very heart of profession of faith in the Holy Trinity. The triune God has named himself, and he likes his name.

The Grammar of the Triune Name

> For we are bound to be baptized in the terms we have received and to profess belief in the terms in which we are baptized, and as we have professed belief in, so to give glory to Father, Son and Holy Ghost.[1]

In the course of defending the divinity of the Holy Spirit, Basil the Great enunciated the above grammatical rule for Christian faith and worship. His argument is that our common baptism into the name of the Holy Trinity functions to shape the public life of the people of God. As we have been baptized, so must we formulate and confess our creedal belief; as we profess our faith, so must we pray, composing our worship and doxology accordingly. Baptism, creed, liturgy—all together form an interlocking whole, a language of faith; yet within this network of communication the sacrament of baptism plays a formative role. It structures both our profession of faith and our offering of praise. The God who is acclaimed in the ecumenical symbol of the church and the God who is invoked in the communal liturgy is to be the selfsame God into whom we are first baptized.

Holy baptism thus governs and shapes the language of faith, and it does so with divine authority: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations," Christ Jesus enjoins his followers, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). Explicitly written as a command of the exalted Lord enthroned in the fullness of eschatological power and presented in the canonical apostolic tradition, the baptismal mandate exercises a normative authority in the life of the Body of Christ.[2] There is no other more authoritative tradition over against which to appeal. By the decree of Christ, the church is sent into the world and instructed to initiate believers into the triune name of God. Either we obey this command or we simply cease to be the church. Holy baptism, therefore, is the primal embodiment of the gospel and is properly construed as foundational and constitutive of ecclesial life. From baptism flows our discourse and prayer, ordered by that verbally identified reality into which we are sacramentally incorporated.

Given this morphotic and configurative function of the baptismal naming, Basil insists on the traditional wording, rejecting all alterations and substitutions. "It is enough for us," he states, "to confess those names which we have received from Holy Scripture, and to shun all innovations about them."[3] The canonical mandate, in other words, is received as dogma, binding on the community as a whole. The significance of the dogma goes far beyond the establishment of a common rite of initiation. It is grammatical instruction stipulating the speech and practice of the church: God is to be named as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[4]

Trinitarian speech pervades the corporate life of Christians. We begin the liturgy with the invocation of the triune God. We join our voices in threefold creedal acclamation in the confession of the catholic faith. The Eucharistic prayer is classically given distinct trinitarian form: the Father is praised and thanked for the blessings of creation and salvation, the crucified and resurrected Jesus is remembered and extolled, and the outpouring of the Spirit is besought upon both the community and the oblations of bread and wine. Whenever the church acts in the ministry of Christ, whether to bless, absolve, anoint for healing, or ordain to office, the triune God is explicitly proclaimed, entreated, glorified, named. Even our shortest prayers and collects are concluded in trinitarian doxology: "through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you [the Father] and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever."

At the center of ecclesial society is the proclamation of the gospel and the recounting of the biblical narrative. We tell

the story of the God of Israel, creator of the universe, who gathers a people to himself in holy covenant, binding them to him by name and sacrifice and prophetic word. For hundreds of years, the Lord shapes, breaks, and molds his people, forming them into faithful witnesses and joyful worshipers. Through Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Moses, Miriam, Aaron, Deborah, David, Isaiah, the Lord executes his salvific will in the history of his Israel. Finally, in the fullness of time, he sends his Son, the promised Messiah, to offer atonement for the sins of the world.… We tell the story of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of this God, born to and into God's people. Prophet, teacher, healer, eschatological bearer of the future kingdom—Jesus confronts Israel with the exhilarating message of the incomparable love of the One he calls Father, a love revolutionary in its unconditionality and grace, a love that demands new garments and new wineskins, conversion and discipleship, death and rebirth. This Jesus, however, is intolerable; his message and presence are too threatening. He is betrayed, denounced, humiliated, and executed as a common criminal. But the Father vindicates his Son on Easter morning by raising him from the dead and exalting him to his right hand, establishing him as the destiny and conclusion of the universe…. We tell the story of the Holy Spirit, the divine breath that moved over the waters of chaos at the beginning of creation, who spoke through Moses and the prophets, who anointed Jesus with unconquerable power to heal the sick, exorcize evil, and raise the dead. It is this Spirit the risen Christ promises to pour out on the community of faith, and by this Spirit the church is driven into the world to proclaim the gospel and bring sinners into the new creation of the kingdom. Into him each believer is immersed and born anew, baptized into the love of the Father and the Son.

"The Church," writes George Lindbeck, "is fundamentally identified and characterized by its story."[5] At any point in history, the church of Jesus may be picked out as that assembly proclaiming the narrative of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and promising it as good news to its hearers. We speak not of deity-in-general but of the God who is self-revealed in the biblical drama: the three divine actors who together, in essential, ontological unity, accomplish the salvation of humankind. The trinitarian narrative functions as the paradigm through which both deity and creation are interpreted and provides the foundational content and vocabulary for our preaching, liturgy, and theology. By this story the imaginative life of the church is renovated; through it the people of God envision their mission and ministry; in it all believers find forgiveness for their past and hope for their future. It is the story of the triune God that is summarized and encapsulated in the triune name. The threefold appellation may thus be said to identify the church, for it encompasses that story which the church tells and must tell in order to be the church. When we are baptized into this name, we are baptized into a way of life, being, and speaking constituted by the evangelical narrative of the trinitarian God. But if the triune name and the manifold trinitarian namings of the language of faith identify the Christian church, this is so because the appellation first and primarily identifies the God of the church. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is our deity's *proper name*.[6]

Proper names are distinguished from common nouns in that they signify singular and unique objects rather than classes of objects. A proper name allows us to designate a specific something, separating it from the anonymity of existence for communication, study, use, love. Even deities need proper names. We need to be able to identify which one we are addressing, worshiping, obeying, fleeing.

In the resurrection of Jesus, God declares his name of the new covenant: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). This name articulates the apostolic experience of God in Christ. It identifies the specific deity we are talking about or praying to as being precisely the God of the New Testament. Each term within the name links us to God's historic self-disclosure; each is grounded in the salvation narrative; each interprets the other two. "Father" refers specifically to the holy transcendence whom the Nazarene knows as *Abba*, to whom he bids us pray. "Our Father, who art in heaven." "Son" designates Jesus in unique filial relationship to the Father: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). "Spirit" is the communal love and life and future of the aforementioned Father and Son. Together these mutually coordinated names form one name, a name proper and personal to the Christian God.[7] Thus the holy creator introduces himself to the world.

With the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, our God is clearly identified and our experience of deity linguistically defined. Each believer, by the mandate of the risen Christ, is baptized into this name, initiated into a concrete, verbally determined relationship with the triune God of the Scriptures. From this point on, we meet and experience the deity from within the trinitarian narrative proclaimed in the community of faith. We are the people of the Trinity, shaped and formed by the threefold appellation of our God. "Baptism into the name of the 'the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,'" writes Catherine LaCugna, "means incorporation into the power and essence of God, into the history and story of God, into the life and heart and identity of God."[8] The dominical command, therefore, both sanctions the triune name by divine revelation and establishes it as a necessary function in our knowledge of the living God.[9] God gives himself to us in his name and by his name defines our experience of him as triune. We know the deity as the Holy Trinity because we speak, pray, hear, believe, and worship his personal name.

The proper-name function of the trinitarian formula has recently been criticized by Ted Peters. He argues that proper names refer arbitrarily and ostensively and are consequently transliterated from language to language, whereas the triune formula is universally translated. According to Peters, this indicates that "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit" are metaphorical titles.[10] Peter's argument can be met by acknowledging that within the triune name, "Father," "Son," and "Spirit" are relational,

denominating titles of address, each of which signifies one of the three persons of the Trinity, and each of which are analogically correlated to human realities. They are therefore rightly and necessarily translated into equivalent terminology as the gospel moves into new cultures. However, when brought together—as they are, for example, in holy baptism or the Gloria Patri—they function as one personal name identifying the one Christian God and separating that God from all other deities. This means that the trinitarian formula enjoys a special status as a proper name. As Robert Jenson notes, "A proper name is proper just insofar as it is used independently of aptness to the one named, but it need not therefore lack such aptness."[11] Of decisive importance here is the fact that the baptismal institution stipulates initiation into the *name* (singular) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[12]

As we have been baptized, so must we confess and pray our faith. We are incorporated into a distinctive language and grammar. The great Anglican divine Richard Hooker saw this quite clearly in the sixteenth century. In defending the Anglican form of the Gloria Patri against Puritan objections, he wrote,

> Baptizing we use the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; confessing the Christian faith we declare our belief in the Father, and in the Son ,and in the Holy Ghost; ascribing glory unto God we give it to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. It is "the token of a true and sound understanding" for matter[s] of doctrine about the Trinity, when in ministering baptism, and making confession, and giving glory, there is a conjunction of all three, and no one of the three severed from the other two.[13]

By our baptism we are charged and authorized to name God by his revealed name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This triune name forms the identity of the Christian church and structures the grammar of catholic belief and practice. Christians cannot be *Christian* if they refrain from speaking the trinitarian language. To replace or alter the triune formula is to repudiate the creed, church, God of our baptism.

We may examine two recent proposals. First, "Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier." This formula does not and cannot function as a proper name: it does not identify; it does not specify which God we are talking about. All putative deities presumably create, redeem, and sanctify, as well as do numerous other things.[14] Furthermore, within classical trinitarian theory these *ad extra* activities are understood as contingent cooperative works of the Godhead. The Father creates, redeems, and sanctifies through the Son by the Spirit. Each person of the Trinity is fully involved in the functional activities of deity. Or, to put it slightly differently, God was not always creator, redeemer, sanctifier; he has become such by his free decision.[15] Within the divine life of the Godhead, however, the deity is eternally Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is his name before time and forever.

Second, there is "Mother, Lover, Friend." This truly feminist alternative raises serious difficulties of another sort. Perhaps what is most objectionable is that it so clearly seeks to evade the biblical narrative; it is so clearly our own invention. Speak "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" and immediately we know we are speaking of the God of the New Testament. But to what deity does "Mother, Lover, Friend" refer? What story are we telling when we name divinity thus? And if we are telling a different story, are we not creating a new religion? This and all similar formulas sunder the church from the evangelical narrative by which we identify our God as well as ourselves. They "disrupt the faith's self-identity at the level of its primal and least-reflected historicity."[16] Furthermore, this formula is open to the same criticism as that given "Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier." Are the terms to be interpreted only in relationship to us, in which case we are presented not with a proper name but with *ad extra* descriptions, or are they to be interpreted *within* the name? It is difficult indeed to reconcile the latter with the biblical story, not to mention Christian sensibility!

The God Who is Known

> Therefore it is more pious and more accurate to signify God from the Son and call Him Father, than to name Him from His works only and call Him unoriginate. For the latter title does nothing more than signify all the works, individually and collectively, which have come to be at the will of God through the Word; but the title Father has its significance and its bearing only from the Son.[17]

In his debate with Arianism, Athanasius was compelled to address the question of how we name God. In their philosophical understanding of deity, his opponents were fond of calling God "the unoriginate," which they evidently believed spoke clearly and accurately of the divine being. The term emphasizes that divinity is self-sufficient in its transcendent reality, plainly distinguished from the contingent creation. Unlike the misleading anthropomorphic and metaphorical terminology of the Bible, the term "unoriginate" is true and precise. Athanasius responded by noting that such naming is a form of negative theology which speaks of God not as he is in his inner reality, not as he is in his divine nature, but only in his relationship to that which is made by him out of nothing. It thinks of divinity exclusively in terms of creaturely being; it apprehends God solely by his works. We believe the universe to be created, contingent, finite, dependent for its existence upon the deity; thus we call God the unoriginate and creator, thereby contrasting him with that which he is not. We construe him in his absolute difference and distance from us. For Athanasius, while what we say in this regard may be true—but as Gregory Nazianzen commented, if we do not know what something is, how can we specify what it is not?[18]—it does not yet grasp God in his internal being. It is analogous to inferring the character and personality of Shakespeare by reading only his plays. Such an approach to divinity is

inherently anthropocentric, for it conceives the deity from a center in ourselves and the created order, not from a center in God. Ultimately, we end up knowing simply ourselves turned inside out. We are thus no better off, says Athanasius disparagingly, than the Greeks.[19]

To name God the Father and the Son is to speak of the deity as he is in the immanent reality and relations of his divine essences. It is thus to know him objectively, truly, accurately. When we name God Father, we are naming him neither by abstraction from creation (*via negative*) nor by infinite extension of creation (*via eminentiae*) nor by self-projection (mythology); rather, we are identifying him by the eternal Son, who belongs to the divine being and is proper to the Godhead, who has projected himself into creation in the person of Jesus Christ. The playwright has stepped into his play. In Jesus our theological reflection and knowing are ontologically grounded *in God*. The Father/Son relation, therefore, must have primacy over the creator/creature relation in our apprehension of divinity.

In the Nicene Creed the catholic church confesses the following: "We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, *of one Being* with the Father" (emphasis added). The key phrase, which originates from the creed adopted by the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325, is the affirmation of the incarnate Christ's oneness of being (*homoousios*) with the Father. While this confession was vague enough to permit a plurality of interpretations at the Council, it clearly excluded Arius and his followers and they knew it. It is to Athanasius that we owe the triumph of the *homoousion* in its evangelical radicality: Athanasius forcefully declared that our Lord's oneness of being with the Father was to be understood in terms of identity. Jesus of Nazareth—the creed speaks of the incarnate Son and not the logos *asarkos* ("Word without flesh")—fully possesses the divine *ousia* ("essence"). In the divide between creator and creature, Jesus is to be located clearly and categorically on the creator side. The Nazarene is God; the Galilean rabbi is a member of the Holy Trinity. Thus Jesus Christ in the fullness of his incarnate humanity, the man born of Mary and crucified under Pontius Pilate, the friend of tax collectors and sinners, is constitutive of the deity. In the words of Athanasius, "And so, since they are one, and the Godhead itself one, the same things are said of the Son, which are said of the Father, except His being said to be Father."[20]

God has incarnated himself in time and space. He has come as Man, as the specific human being Jesus who lived and died in the first century in an obscure Middle Eastern country. The theological consequences of this confession are revolutionary. In Jesus we may now know God directly and personally. The deity has presented himself to us as an object.[21] This objectivity is of course mediated—we meet God only in his assumed creaturely form—but it is an objectivity nonetheless in which the triune bestows *himself* to our human knowing. As with any other object, we may now pick out our God: "There he is. That one, the son of Mary. He is the One I worship." In the concrete particularity of the crucified Jew, we apprehend the deity, in and by the Spirit, according to this divine nature. We may use the word "revelation" to describe the gift of divine objectivity, but only as long as we understand it to mean more than creaturely modeling or the conveying of information, to mean the communication of God's very self.

Once the Incarnation has taken place, once the eternal Word has made himself object in Jesus, we may no longer look anywhere else to find divinity. God has chosen the time, the place, and the media by which we may meet him. The humanity of Christ is the trysting grounds of our love affair with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The faithful man Jesus therefore defines and interprets the reality of God. Identical in being with the Father, our Lord embodies—finally, decisively, conclusively—the character, life, and essence of deity. Karl Barth expresses this powerfully:

> The Word of God does not just come to us through the man Jesus of Nazareth, as though we could later have heard it and known it in itself and apart from him. The Word of God is this man as man, and always and inescapably it is spoken to us as the reality of this man and not otherwise. This is God's mercy, that precisely in the reality, no, as the reality of this man, God is Immanuel, God with us, God among us.[22]

This is not Christological triumphalism (christo-fascism, as some put it), as though the church is parsimoniously restricting the knowledge of deity to a select few. It is the humble recognition that in Christ we are, by grace, confronted with the fullness of divinity and given access to the immanent triune being. Jesus is the second person of the Trinity, risen into the divine society of the Godhead. Consequently, we may not evade the Nazarene or go behind his back in our quest to find deity, for the holy God has terminated our quest by becoming the object Christ and enacting his trinitarian life among us.

It is crucial to understand that Jesus reveals God the Father precisely in his identity as the begotten Son.[23] Jesus is not the Father but the Son, and it is as the Son that he discloses the Father. The divine Fatherhood and Sonship are correlative: the Father is the Father *of* Jesus, and Jesus is the Son *of* the Father. Neither can be conceived or known apart from the other. The two are united in being and agency: Jesus is the place where the Father is encountered. From Christ we learn who the Father is; in him we learn from the Father who the Son is. We meet both simultaneously and coincidentally in mutually defining relationship. Thus our Lord can insist that he is the sole mediator of our knowledge of the Father: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me…. Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:6, 9). This is the theological explanation why "Father" is used infrequently in the Old Testament to refer to God, and used even less frequently as a term of address. Until Jesus arrives on the scene, the God of Israel is known only in his undifferentiated

oneness, addressed principally by the ineffable name of Yahweh. Only the Son can introduce us to his Father.

We may now return to the text of Athanasius with which we began this section. When the church names God as the Father and the Son, it is speaking of the creator in his inner reality, referring to relations subsisting in the divine *ousia*. Unlike the Arians, Athanasius insists that we truly know the deity in Jesus Christ—as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When challenged why we may and must use this language, he replies that it is sanctioned and authorized by the divine Word himself who knew "whose Son He was."[24]

A God with History

> From the ancient church on, the root trinitarian assertion is that the history God has with us, as Jesus the Israelite with his "Father" in their Spirit, is not merely a manifestation or revelation of God but is God.[25]

That God should have a history is nonsense in view of our inherited understandings of deity. God, after all, is that reality which dwells outside time as the creator of time. He is eternal, the pure actualization of being, immune to the changes and movements of temporality. We may speak of God as the Lord of history, but we well understand this to mean his providential guidance of history from the external vantage point of heaven or supernature. We certainly do not mean he is an actor within history, making history, having history, living through history. On the contrary, God in his timelessness is impassible, ultimately unaffected by the events and happenings of the world.

Yet there at the heart of the Christian gospel is the story of God become Man, a God who is born, who is raised in Nazareth, who breathes and eats and cries and laughs and loves, a God who suffers and dies. This is a God who in Christ both affects and is affected by the world, a God who has, in the words of Jonathan Edwards, "really become passionate to his own."[26] This gospel is thus the claim that the deity has a history—the history of Jesus in Israel. The Word has become flesh; the Crucified is *homoousios* with the Father; the eternal Son lives in and through time. It is the peculiarity of this God that he is identified not by abstract attributes but by narrative —by historical descriptions and biblical stories. We remember what he has done in the past and we anticipate his promise of what he will do in the future: "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again." Our God is eternal in that he is faithful in time to his promises. The divine transcendence is properly described as eschatological futurity or temporal unsurpassability.[27]

That the eternity of the biblical God is irreconcilable with the eternity of Greek philosophy is increasingly apparent today, but for almost two thousand years Christians have been convinced that the being of God must be defined by its transcendence of temporality. Thus the theological problem: How do we keep together the divine timelessness and the narrative descriptions of God's history? Well, it's not easy. Athanasius is a case in point. On the one hand, he is emphatic in this insistence that in Jesus, God has come as Man, a full-blooded human being, with biography and all. On the other hand, all the Hellenistic predicates also obtain: God is incorruptible, immaterial, unchangeable, and so forth. In his fidelity to Scripture, Athanasius did not attempt to resolve the paradox; but later theologians, particularly in the West, did try, and usually at the expense of the biblical understanding.

When a Greek comprehension of deity is joined to the biblical narrative of God's history with us in Christ, dualism appears at two closely connected points. One, the pre-existent Word, the *logos asarkos*, is posited as the inner-trinitarian ground of creation.[28] God creates and saves the world not through Jesus of Nazareth but through his metaphysical discarnate double. Two, the processions of the immanent Trinity are divorced from the historical missions of the economic Trinity.[29] The begetting of the Son and the spiration of the Spirit become ineffable events unconnected to salvation history. With the occurrence of these two moves, the way is prepared for the proliferation, beginning in the Middle Ages, of treatises devoted to *De Deo Uno*, quite independent of *De Deo Trino*. Thus the divine being of the Godhead is *uninterpreted* by the historical event of Jesus. We determine through our philosophy, ideology, culture, and religious experience what deity is, and then we assert that his deity is somehow and in some way "revealed" through Jesus. Within modern Protestant reflection this ultimately results in the theological irrelevance of the Nazarene and renders the doctrine of the Holy Trinity disposable.

The contemporary renaissance in trinitarian theology—perhaps best summarized under the dictum "The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity"—has made possible a fresh appropriation of the trinitarian grammar. Robert W. Jenson is the foremost American representative of this new theological paradigm. Jenson asks us to move from a theology of revelation to a theology of constitution: it is not that the stories of Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit vaguely reveal the divine being; they are constitutive of it. The historic relationship in the Spirit between Christ Jesus and his Father, lived out in the conditions of first-century Palestine and eternally established in the resurrection and ascension of our Lord, is the triune life of the Godhead. The Christian God has a history, and just as the identity of every human being is defined by the life he or she lives, so the identity of our God is defined by his history with us. God *is* the Father who grieves for the death of his Jesus at Calvary. God *is* the Son who prefers the company of harlots and tax collectors to that of religious professionals. God *is* the Spirit poured out on the church on the day of Pentecost who will bring us into the kingdom of the Father and the Son. The Holy Trinity does not lie behind or under these historical events; the Trinity is constituted in and by them. There is no other God but the God who knows himself as this history. "Truly, the Trinity is simply the Father and the man Jesus and their Spirit as the Spirit

of the believing community," writes Jenson. "This 'economic' Trinity is *eschatologically* God 'himself,' an 'immanent Trinity.'"[30]

The confession of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit directly challenges our antecedent construals of divinity. Specifically, it compels us to reconceptualize the doctrines of divine timelessness and impassibility, which have led theology into a disastrous divorce between the immanent reality of God and his historic self-objectification in Jesus Christ. The biblical history of Jesus is the history of God—this is the radical trinitarian claim. The economic relations between the Galilean rabbi crucified under Pontius Pilate and the transcendent reality whom Jesus names his Father and the eschatological power who creates the future from the ashes of death belong to the internal life of the Godhead. Unlike most theological methods that lead us away from history and the temporalities of the created order into the infinite, unknowable, homogeneous abyss of motionless deity, the doctrine of the Trinity fully grounds our knowledge of the living God in history, in that concrete history which God knows as his own, in that dominical history constitutive of the divine *ousia*. Thus the trinitarian confession will always be offensive to culture and church, for it binds theological reflection to the givens of Scripture and requires us to think divinity through the particularities of the Nazarene. But if we are so bound, so is God. And here is the heart of the offense: the God of the gospel freely establishes his triune identity not in pretemporal hiddenness but in and by specific—and quite visible, audible, and knowable—finite realities and events. We may not, therefore, transcend God's history with us in Christ, for not only does God not endeavor to transcend it but he incorporates it into his eschatological eternity. The trinitarian narrative is foundational within the Godhead. When the deity seeks to know who he is, he looks at Jesus the Israelite; when he seeks to understand who he has been and will be, he tells himself the biblical story of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The new nonsexist liturgies of the Episcopal Church (*Prayer Book Studies 30*) illustrate the direction of moderate feminism today. They aver a trinitarian theology while simultaneously abstracting from the divine historicity: "We are challenged with being faithful to the creedal tradition of the Church, while, at the same time, naming the God who is 'One in Three and Three in One' in non-gender specific terms."[31] One specific way this is worked out in the texts is the virtual elimination of the vocative "Father." With the exception of the Lord's Prayer, God is addressed only as "God." When the Trinity is understood eschatologically, however, all such efforts to evade the particularities of the biblical revelation are shown to be both futile and apostate. Apart from the constituting temporal events of the evangelical narrative, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is meaningless. Expunge the trinitarian namings of the language of faith and the triune God does not come to speech.

As Geoffrey Wainwright has observed, Jesus' use of "Father" as an address to God must be distinguished, though not separated, from the figurative use of "father" (or "mother") as a way of describing the deity's care for humankind.[32] The linguistic reason for this is that kinship terms, when used in direct invocation and discourse, have unique reference and thus "behave like proper nouns."[33] That is to say, they specifically identify their referents and thereby function as personal names. When, for example, my daughter calls out "Daddy," I simultaneously recognize both her voice and the title, and immediately conclude she is speaking to me and respond accordingly. However, if another little girl calls out "Daddy," I do not respond, for I know the title does not, in this case, apply to me. Within the circle of my family, the vocative "Daddy" personally identifies me to my children and establishes me in a specific kind of relationship with them and them with me. To the rest of the world I am known as "Al" or "Alvin," but to my children I am known as "Daddy." Indeed, if my children were to begin addressing me by some other name—even if they were to name me by my given name—this act would be a virtual denial of our familial relationship.

Within Christian usage "Father" is not just one of many metaphors imported by fallen sinners onto the screen of eternity. It is a filial, denominating title of address *revealed* in the person of the eternal Son. "On the lips of Jesus," Wolfhart Pannenberg states, "'Father' becomes a proper name for God. It thus ceased to be simply one designation among others. It embraces every feature in the understanding of God which comes to light in the message of Jesus. It names the divine Other in terms of whom Jesus saw himself and to whom he referred his disciples and hearers."[34] Jesus names the holy God of Israel *Abba*, "Father," thereby expressing, and indeed effectuating, the intimate inner communion between them, a unique relationship of knowing and love. "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son" (Mat. 11:27). By this historical address God is acknowledged as the hope, joy, ultimate source, and final authority in our Lord's life; by this address he is *constituted* as the Father. The dominical naming occurs *within* the being of the Godhead. It is an event of the divine biography, an eternal act of self-differentiation occurring in time. When uttered by the incarnate Word, "Father" (defined exclusively by Christ himself in the totality of his filial existence) is a creative, performative word of eschatological power—analogous, on a different level, to God's speaking forth the universe in Genesis 1—which eternally calls into being the One who loves his Son beyond all imaginings, beyond all conditions and limits. The Father *receives from Jesus*, through the power of the Spirit, his hypostatic identity *as Father*.

Here we admittedly move beyond those traditional reflections that protect the impassibility of the Father by constituting his identity solely in his pretemporal begetting of the preincarnate Son: the deity of the Son is conceived purely passively; it is the Father, the fount of all divinity, who is the active, generating agent.[35] The Son thus contributes nothing to the personal reality of the Father and therefore his temporal naming of God must be

construed as only metaphorical human projection, perhaps illustrative of (or by feminist lights, perhaps not!) but ontologically irrelevant to the unoriginated *hypostasis* (person). But when we break down the wall between the immanent and economic Trinities—thereby allowing actual traffic between creator and creature—we can begin to think more dynamically and dialectically about the *reciprocal* relations between the divine persons.[36] Jesus is the Son, for he is eternally generated of the Father, sent into the world to accomplish the salvific will of his God, but the Father is the Father in that he is eternally named and glorified as such by Jesus. The Father is personally defined by the filial address, trusting obedience, sacrificial death, and joyful worship of his begotten Son. He submits himself to the embodied judgment of the Nazarene. "What there is to being God the Father is being addressed as 'Father' by the Son, Jesus," Robert Jenson writes. "In that Jesus cries, 'Father, into your hands…' and in that he who says this will be the final event, *there* is the Father."[37] From the man Jesus, God hears the words of filial invocation and receives that love, self-giving, and affirmation evoked by his own love for his only begotten child; from his Son he apprehends who he is in his divine Fatherhood. The Father knows himself only in and from this Son.

The reciprocity and mutuality of this relationship in the Spirit structures the inner communion of the Trinity and demonstrates the infinite love of the Father for Christ Jesus. In that God withholds nothing in autonomous self-possession but in love and risk communicates the fullness of his being and life to Jesus, and in that he remains faithful to Jesus through the agonizing rupture of Calvary, and in resurrection subjects the cosmos to his Son's absolute Lordship and authority (Matt. 28:18; Phil 2:9-11), and in that he awaits from Jesus the deliverance of the kingdom into his hands (1 Cor 15:20-28), God becomes utterly dependent on his Son for his identity, completely open to Christ's defining confession of him: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you" (John 17:1). Thus the temporal, historical event of Christ's relating to God as Father, so abundantly and clearly presented in the Gospels, is simultaneously an eschatological event whereby the deity constitutes and differentiates the divine being. The consubstantial relationship between the Father and the Son is confirmed and established on Easter morning: by the resurrection there forever stands before the first person of the Godhead the One who calls him *Abba.*

If the Father is constituted by Jesus Christ's invocation of him, then we can see the impossibility of substituting "Mother" (Or some other variant) as a term of filial address. Perhaps Jesus could have addressed God as his mother (though cogent reasons might be offered in explanation or support of his choice not to do so), in which case the first person of the Godhead would likewise be constituted as Mother. But the decisive fact is that "Father" is Jesus' chosen term, and the identity of the economic and essential Trinities precludes us from tampering with this language. In trinitarian doctrine, historical contingency may enjoy theological finality.[38]

The divine Son commands Christians to address his Father as their Father: "Pray then like this: Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name" (Matt. 6:9). This filial invocation is a privilege of adoption in Christ Jesus. By baptism we are incorporated into the humanity of our Lord and his eternal relationship with the Father in the power of the Spirit (Gal. 3:26-4:6). In Christ we are inserted into the trinitarian conversation of the Godhead. The prayer, praise, and intercession of God the Son are realized in the lives of his adopted brothers and sisters. "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear," the Apostle heralds, "but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, '*Abba*, Father'" (Rom. 8:15). By the gift of the Spirit the church is drawn into the vicarious worship of its risen Lord: by grace we now share in the eschatological address of the Son. With and through Christ we boldly name God "Father" and enter into intimate fellowship with him. Thus the structure and languaging of our prayer and discourse both manifests the triune society of the Godhead and enacts our participation in it. As Jenson observes,

> Christians bespeak God in a triune coordinate system; they speak *to* the Father, *with* the Son, *in* the Spirit, and only so bespeak *God*. Indeed, they live in a sort of temporal space defined by these coordinates, and just and only so live "in God."…The decisive gospel-insight is that if we only pray *to* God, if our relation to God is reducible to the "to" and is not decisively determined also by "with" and "in," then it is not the true God whom we identify in our address, but rather some distant and timelessly uninvolved divinity whom we have envisaged. We pray indeed *to* the Father, and so usually address the Father simply as "God." But we address *this* Father in that and only in that we pray *with* Jesus *in* their Spirit. The particular God of Scripture does not just stand over against us; he envelops us. And only by the full structure of the envelopment do we have this God.[39]

Where is God? He is in heaven, we say. Where is heaven? It is wherever Christians invoke the Father with their brother Jesus in his Spirit. By our trinitarian naming the triune God is actualized in time.

The God of the gospel identifies himself in and by the particularities of the biblical narrative. Our prayer to God and our speech about him, therefore, will be true only to the extent that they are controlled by the temporal events of the evangelical history. We may find this frustrating, offensive, and scandalous; but the sovereign God nevertheless remains free to be for us whom he has eternally elected to be in the history of Jesus of Nazareth: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

The Holy Trinity is the God who has named himself Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By this name and by the

narrative comprehended within it, the identity of the living God is revealed and constituted. Through it we are given access into the triune life of the Godhead. Current feminist proposals for altering the language of faith therefore have the most profound significance.[40] If I am correct in my preceding analysis, these changes touch the substance of the gospel. To abandon or reject the trinitarian naming is to create a new religion, a new God. Yet this crisis carries within itself a wonderful opportunity: it may and indeed must provoke our theological reflection to a radical appropriation and reformulation of the trinitarian dogma. When this occurs, we will see that the triune God is not a deity of sexism and patriarchy but the God of the gospel who saves men and women from their sin and liberates them for love, discipleship, and joyous fellowship in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[1] Basil, Epistle 125.3, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (NPNF), 2nd series, 14 vols. (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1890-1900), vol. 8; see also *Ep*. 159.2. Basil's brother, Gregory of Nyssa, offers similar instruction: see *Ep.* 2, in NPNF, vol. 5.

[2] On the contingent finality of sacramental mandate, see Robert W. Jenson, *Visible Words: The Interpretation and Practice of Christian Sacraments* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), pp. 6-9; on the baptismal mandate, see pp. 126-35.

[3] Basil, *Ep*. 175; see also *Ep.* 188.1; *Ep.* 125.3.

[4] Gregory of Nyssa describes each of the titles within the triune name as "a rule of truth and a law of piety"; see Against Eunomius, in NPNF, vol. 5. See also Deborah Malacky Belonick, "Revelation and Metaphors: The Significance of the Trinitarian Names, Father, Son and Holy Spirit," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 40/3 (1985): 31-41.

[5] Lindbeck, "The Story-shaped Church: Critical Exegesis and Theological Interpretation," in *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation*, ed. Garrett Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 165.

[6] See Robert W. Jenson's important discussion in *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), pp. 12-20. Cf. Catherine Mowry LaCunga, "The Baptismal Formula, Feminist Objections, and Trinitarian Theology," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26 (spring 1989): 235-50. For an interesting linguistic analysis see Christian J. Barrigar, "Protecting God: the Lexical Formation of Trinitarian Language," *Modern Theology* 7 (July 1991): 299-310.

My argument presumes both the possibility and the actuality of God's self-naming in our historical experience. That God in fact has named himself in the history of Israel and the person of Jesus Christ seems clear from the biblical narrative and the importance of the holy name of God acknowledged throughout the Scriptures (see, e.g., Exod. 3:13-15; 33:19; John 17:6, 11-12). Feminist discussions of naming God almost universally premise that all historical names originate exclusively in humanity and are thus *our projections upon the deity*. Thus limited by both creatureliness and cultural experience, traditional names enjoy only relative authority. Each generation is obligated to search for new namings more adequate to their religious experience and understanding. This is true of even irenic presentations: for example, see James E. Griffiss, *Naming the Mystery: How Our Words Shape Prayer and Belief* (Cambridge: Cowley, 1990). For more radical analyses, see Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983); Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); and Brian Wren, *What Language Shall I Borrow? God-Talk in Worship: A Male Response to Feminist Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

[7] Jenson, The Triune Identity, pp. 12-13, 17-18.

[8] LaCunga, "The Baptismal Formula," p. 248.

[9] See Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), p. 70.

[10] Peters, "The Battle Over Trinitarian Language," *Dialog* 30 (Winter 1991): 47-49. Peters does emphatically affirm the trinitarian names as nonexchangeable symbols inextricably tied "to the event of revelation and salvation itself." Thus, he concludes, "to bypass the biblical terms in favor of some substitutes is to identify with a God other than that of Jesus Christ" (ibid., p. 49). Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite also rejects the proper-name function of the trinitarian formula, also posing the false dilemma of metaphor or name, but her substantive argument is minimal and flawed by misreadings of her sources (patristic and contemporary). See "On the Trinity," *Interpretation* 45 (April 1991): 165-67.

[11] Jenson, The Triune Identity, p. 18. Is it really the case, as Peters claims, that proper names are never translated from language to language? Native American names, for example, immediately come to mind. Contrary to Peters, Christian Barrigar recognizes that common nouns can become proper nouns. He calls this rhetorical process, "whereby a proper name is given on the basis of a leading quality," antonomasia. See also Jenson's brief response to Peters in *Dialog* 30 (Summer 1991): 247.

[12] At the turn of the century the Anglican theologian Francis J. Hall wrote, "The most perfect name of God is that of the Blessed Trinity—The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost—a name which is at once singular in number, and threefold in articulation" (*Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 3: The Being and Attributes of God [New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1909], p. 229).

[13] Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* 5.42.8.

[14] Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, p. 17.

[15] Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, pp. 87-89.

[16] Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, p. 17.

[17] Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 1.34, in NPNF, vol. 4. My interpretation of Athanasius is deeply influenced by some of Thomas Torrance's work: "Athanasius: A study in the Foundations of Classical Theology," in *Theology in Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 213-66; "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity According to St. Athanasius," *Anglican Theological Review* 62 (Fall 1989): 395-405; and *The Trinitarian Faith*, especially pp. 47-145.

[18] Gregory Nazianzen, as cited by Torrance in *The Trinitarian Faith*, p. 50.

[19] Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 1.33. It is important to note that much feminist theology shares this "Greek" ignorance of God. Sallie McFague is representative in her explicit denial of the possibility of knowing deity in its internal being (*Models of God*, pp. 223-24, nn.2,3,5). Theological reflection is grounded not in God's self-communication in Christ but in personal (feminist) experience of self and world. Rejection of the Nicene doctrine of the Holy Trinity is thus inevitable. McFague reduces the trinitarian model to an expression of the transcendence-immanence dialectic (ibid., pp. 183-84).

[20] Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 3.4. On the constitutive significance of the Incarnation of the Godhead, see Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith,* pp. 135-90; Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1960), pp. 37-65; and Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols., ed. G. W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1935-1969), II/2:94-194.

[21] See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1:1-62.

[22] Barth, quoted by Bruce Marshall in *Christology in Conflict: The Identity of a Savior in Rahner and Barth* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 129.

[23] See Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, pp. 59-60.

[24] Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 1.34. Precisely because the Father/Son language is grounded in God's economic self-communication, its semantical relation to God is real and not conventional. See Thomas F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), especially chap. 3.

[25] Robert W. Jenson, *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 91. Throughout this section I am indebted to Jenson's creative and provocative work.

[26] Edwards, quoted by Jenson in *America's Theologian*, p. 118.

[27] See Robert W. Jenson, *God after God* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 19609), pp. 123-35; and Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, pp. 138-84).

[28] Robert W. Jenson, "The Christian Doctrine of God," in *Keeping the Faith*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 47.

[29] Robert. W. Jenson, "A 'Protestant Constructive Response' to Christian Unbelief," in *American Apostasy: The Triumph of "Other" Gospels,* ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 65-66.

[30] Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, p. 141. Cf. Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), pp. 151-78.

[31] Commentary on "Prayer Book Studies 30," containing Supplemental Texts (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1989), p. C-20. Abstraction from the biblical story, usually combined with a nonchristological apophaticism, underlies the argumentation of virtually all moderate feminist theologians who wish to remain nominally trinitarian while at the same time advocating inclusive language for God. The result is linguistic iconoclasm. See, for example, Gail Ramshaw Schmidt, "De Divinis Nominibus: The Gender of God," in *The Word and words*, ed. William D. Warley (Princeton: COCU, 1983), pp. 15-25; and Elizabeth A. Johnson, "The Incomprehensibility of God and the Image of God Male and Female," *Theological Studies* 45 (1984); 441-65.

If the Father/Son relation is prior to the creator/creature relation in our knowledge of divinity, and if the temporal relations of Jesus, the Father, and the Spirit are constitutive of the Godhead, then the apophatic prehension of deity, achieved by appeal to God's radical transcendence and the negation of created reality, must be called into question. The incomprehensibility of God is posited in Jesus Christ, not outside of him. Only at the foot of the cross do we behold the true mystery of Godhead. See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1; 186-204, 346-48.

[32] Wainwright, "The Doctrine of the Trinity: Where the Church Stands or Falls," *Interpretation* 45 (April 1991): 119-20. Also see Robert W. Jenson's contribution to the present volume, "The Father, He…" pp. 103-4.

[33] Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech, and Jan Svartik, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (New York: Longman, 1985), p. 292. The authors note that in English such terms are usually capitalized. It is the failure to recognize the referential, denominating function of familial terms that has rendered unsatisfactory, up to this point, much of the scholarly discussion of metaphor and the Christian naming of God as Father.

[34] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 262. Also see Claude Geffre, "'Father' as the Proper Name of God," in *God as Father?* Ed. J. B. Metz and Edward Schillebeeckx (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), pp. 43-50; and Ralph Quere, "'Naming' God 'Father,'" *Currents in Theology and Mission* 12 (February 1985) 5-12.

[35] Jenson suggests that the traditional asymmetry of the trinitarian relations and the location of the divine monarchy in the Father may also be due to male sexism and dominance. See *The Triune Identity*, pp. 143-44.

[36] According to Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The reciprocity in the relationship of the divine persons makes room for the constitutive significance of the central salvation-historical events for the Godhood of God and thus for the significance of time and change for the divine eternity" ("Problems of a Trinitarian Doctrine of God," *Dialog 26* [Fall 1987]: 252).

[37] Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, p. 175. This does not mean, as Jenson points out, that the Father is created by Jesus; rather, Jesus, as the Son, is an essential, irreplaceable term in the reciprocal interpersonal relationship. There is no Father apart from the historical person of Christ, yet there is no time when the Father was not. Needless to say, this can be true only if eternity is conceived eschatologically: God is and always has been Father, Son, and Holy Spirit because he always *will* be (ibid., pp. 140-41). Jenson's elimination of a *logos asarkos* raises the speculative question "Would God have been triune apart from his community with us in the man Jesus (if, e.g., he had never created the universe)?" Jenson answers yes but says that we are unable to state how—nor need we be concerned about this, for God is Holy Spirit and therefore eternally free in his eschatological self-determination (ibid., pp. 141, 146-47).

It should be noted, however, that in his diagram of the inner-trinitarian relations(ibid., pp. 142-43), Jenson does not specify the Son's filial address as constitutive of the Father. He does assert that the Spirit with the Son frees the Father from pretemporal persistence, but he is somewhat vague and general on this point. May we offer the suggestion that God unoriginate is freed from frozen timelessness by the Holy Spirit through the Son's temporal naming of him as Father.

[38] See Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, pp. 13-16, 107. Wolfhart Pannenberg has also recently argued that Jesus' naming of God as Father is final and nonsubstitutable. Unlike our ordinary symbolic and metaphorical language of the deity—which is extrinsic to the divine being and thus exchangeable—the Son's historical naming of God is internal to the Godhead. Consequently, to substitute another name or title for "Father" is to turn to another god. "Where the word 'Father' is replaced by something else," Pannenberg concludes, "There can be no warrant anymore that we are talking about and addressing the same God as Jesus did" (*An Introduction to Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991], pp. 31-32).

[39] Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, pp. 47, 51.

[40] One of the most pressing needs today, especially in light of the popular metaphorical theology of Sallie McFague, is the formulation of a trinitarian understanding of theological language. The work of Karl Barth is suggestive here. See George Hunsinger, "Beyond Literalism and Expressivism: Karl Barth's Hermeneutical Realism," *Modern Theology* 3 (1987); 209-23.

Alvin Kimel, Jr. is pastor of the Church of the Holy Communion (Episcopal), Charleston, SC.

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