



VBWIM Announce Spring Conference

Plans are under way for the annual spring conference of Virginia Baptist Women in Ministry, to be held on March 1, 1997, on the campus of Baptist Seminary at Richmond.

Focusing on the theme of "Family Systems and Congregations," Betty Pugh will lead discussion on ways congregations and ministers function as family, how they interact, and techniques for problem-solving. Presentation will be made based on doctor of ministry work done at the School of Theology at Virginia Union University. The Rev. Betty Pugh is the associate pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Richmond, and is the former chair of Virginia Baptist Women in Ministry.

The workshop is a one-day program, and will include lunch. Child care will be provided by reservation. Details as to cost and exact location on the campus will be available in January.

The location on the seminary campus will enable Virginia Baptist Women in Ministry to offer this conference to seminary students as well as encourage participation by interested persons from other faith communities.



Anne Davis

Anne Davis to Speak

Virginia Baptist Women in Ministry will gather on November 12 for dinner, fellowship, and to hear Anne Davis speak on "Women and Ministry." Anne Davis is the former dean of the School of Social Work at the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Now retired, she spent a year in Virginia recently consulting on ministry opportunities for women and speaking throughout the state. She is a graduate of the University of Richmond and is a native of Virginia.

Virginia women in ministry and guests will share fellowship, renew ties of collegiality, and have opportunity to reflect on the status of women in the churches and in other places of ministry. All are invited.

The meal is held in conjunction with the annual Baptist General Association of Virginia and will be at the Marriott Hotel at 5 p.m.

INSIDE

Focus on

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

IN MY OPINION

Ex Cathedra

Walking On Water

by Ellen Gwathmey

God, through the angel Gabriel, called Mary to do that which, in the world's eyes, was impossible. Instead of saying, "I can't that's impossible," Mary answered, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."

God often calls us to do what seems impossible. Women frequently feel torn between God's call and the world's response of "impossible." We find it difficult to answer every time with Mary's words.

Madeleine L'Engle, one of my favorite authors, wrote in *Walking on Water*:

It helps me to remember that anything Jesus did during his life here on earth is something we should be able to do, too.... If Jesus of Nazareth was God become truly man for us, as I believe he was, then we should be able to walk on water, to heal the sick, even to accept (God's) answer to our prayers when it is not the answer we hope for, when it is "No." Jesus begged in anguish that he be spared the bitter cup, and then humbly added, "but not as I will, Father; as you will." (p. 19)

Peter walked on water until he remembered that humans have forgotten how.

As ministers we are called to heal, to teach, to preach, and, yes, to walk on water. We are the keepers of the "memory of all that God's children are meant to be." (*ibid.*) Plato wrote in one of his dialogues that the chief job of the teacher is to help students remember all they have forgotten, since learning is, in actuality, remembering. When Adam and Even left Eden's garden, perhaps the greatest loss to humanity was that of memory. First, we have to learn/remember, and then we must show others the way, as those who have gone before have shown us.

To be fully human is to regain full memory. Eventually, by faith through grace we shall remember the whole. Eventually, we shall stop listening to the world and shall answer with Mary, "May it be to me as you have said." One day we shall even remember how to walk on water.

*The Rev. Ellen Gwathmey
is minister of outreach and visitation
at River Road Church in Richmond.*

Editorial

Sticks and Stones...

by Barbara Jackson

You know the old nursery rhyme: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me." It is absolutely not true!

Perhaps some wise old Mother Goose came up with the bit of verse to arm the unwary sensitive child with a protective shield against the ubiquitous childhood taunts that always seem aimed at the most vulnerable. "Just ignore the words," the protective mother would say. "If you don't let them know it hurts you, they will go away." Well, did they?

The truth is, words can hurt. Words cruelly spoken can harm the as yet unformed ego. One might begin to believe the cruel taunts and have what we call today self-esteem problems.

But it is more than a self-esteem problem when girls believe the lies that they can't do or be something just because they are girls.

Words can also shape reality. We begin to believe a thing because someone said it is so. And that is exactly what has taken place in the church when we think about God.

This issue of SYNERGY focuses on the issue of inclusive language ... why is it an issue? ... what can be done? ... how should we think?

Is God a male? ... did God create women to be subordinate to men? ... does generic language include women? Many people think the answer to these questions is yes. What do you think? And what can you do to create dialog without rancor?

Read on.

Barbara Jackson is the editor of SYNERGY

SYNERGY, the newsletter of Virginia Baptist Women in Ministry, is published in Richmond, Va. Membership is \$20 per year (\$10, students). Manuscript submissions should be mailed to SYNERGY Editor, 9211 Whitmont Dr., Richmond, VA 23294. Editorial Board: Lisa Allison, Rhonda Biller, Ginny Brown, Ellen Gwathmey, chair, Holly J. Irvin, treasurer, Barbara Jackson, newsletter editor, B.J. Seymour, Patti Sunday-Winters, Alana Woolley. ©1996

The Shaping Power of Language: Images of God and Person

by B.J. Seymour

William Safire once wrote an article entitled “When What You Hear is What You Speak.” In it, he illustrated how words spoken to children are sometimes misunderstood by them in delightfully distorted ways. He says:

The most saluted man in America is Richard Stans. Legions of schoolchildren place their hands over their hearts to pledge allegiance to the flag, “and to the republic of Richard Stans.” ... When they come to “one nation, indivisible,” (they are) likely to say, “One nation and a vegetable.”

Doubtless, we would all agree that this is charming, but precisely because of its charm, we are likely to miss a very important point which is hidden there, namely, that words and their consequences are utterly serious. The way we hear language, i.e., the images we receive from language, are crucial for us because it is largely through them that we perceive and organize our understanding of ourselves and of our world.

The human being is the only creature who dwells in the linguistic dimension. This is a critically important fact. In addition to *what* we (and all other creatures) are able to convey about ourselves, e.g., our hunger or fatigue, *human* beings are also able to say *who* we are. We can explain, complain, promise, forgive. The relationship between person and word is an intimate one. That is what we suggest when we ask, “Is he as good as his word?” And when I say, “I give you my word,” am I not really committing *myself*? I reveal who I am through the words I choose (out of all those available to me) to express myself, including those I use to conceal myself, i.e., to say who I am not. Using words gives us a way of defining ourselves.

But a serious problem arises just at this point. We have too often allowed this remarkable possibility of self-definition to be preempted by others who stand ready to impose an identity upon us. A case in point is sex role stereotyping.

Much of our understanding of ourselves as male and female is derived from images we have first inherited, then internalized, and finally, imitated. What we have heard is what we are speaking.

Much of this language is considered neutral, but in reality it tacitly transmits definite assumptions about female and male roles. What, in fact, does it tell us about ourselves? Images of women include the following: “*dumb blonde*,” “*the farmer’s daughter*,” “*woman driver*,” mother-in-law jokes, and “*You’ve come a long way, baby!*” And, it is a curious fact that a weak ending in poetry is called a feminine ending!

Concerning males, we have the following: “*It’s a man’s world*,” “*Face it like a man*,” “*That’s a man-sized job*.” And is it not the ultimate insult to the male to refer to him as a “*weak sister*,” i.e., one who like the female is ineffectual?

Language does, indeed, transmit definite expectations about us as women and men. Thus, it is important to realize that the way we use words (or allow others to use them) reflects a particular

perspective; “what” we say reflects “how” we perceive things to be. The message of the images cited above is transparently clear: male is the paradigm of human success.

Given this situation, it seems only reasonable to examine the validity of these stereotypes and to attempt to uncover their origins. Being a professor of religious studies, I regularly prowl about Mt. Sinai (apologies to Kafka). Being somewhat acquainted with its topography, I am forced to admit—alas—that our perceptions about male and female come, to an important degree, from the biblical tradition and that this is doubly significant because the Bible appears to confer official (i.e., divine) sanction upon these stereotypes. What does this mean?

First of all, it is logical to assume male superiority when one hears God (no less) described in the Bible in almost exclusively male imagery.

God is called “*Master*,” “*Father*,” “*King*,” “*Shepherd*,” “*Lord*.” The pronoun referring to deity is “*he*.” Now, we all know perfectly well in our heads that God is neither masculine nor feminine (if, for example, Jesus’ reference to God as Spirit counts as any kind of evidence). But when all the words we use to talk about God come together, they fashion an image that is unequivocally masculine.

LANGUAGE

Do you remember the marvelous little book *Children’s Letters to God*? One of the most provocative of these was written by Sylvia who asked, “Dear God, are boys better than girls. I know you are one but try to be fair.”

The conclusion is inescapable: God is male. I realize that there is not unanimous agreement on this point. However, if we were to attempt to refer to God in some other way (e.g., as Mother), the resulting howls of protest we would encounter would betray how deeply and thoroughly the male image has been ingrained within us. Again—what we say reflects how we think.

When we move in the Bible from language about God to language about the human being, we find that the controlling images are—again—masculine: “*son*,” “*man*,” “*brother*.” Consider the following: “*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature....*” (II Cor. 5:17) and “*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.*” (John 1:12)

Of course, everyone realizes that this language is clearly intended to be generic. But as someone has wryly observed, “generic” in this context, is about as meaningful to the majority of us as talking about “flesh-colored” Band-Aids!

(please turn to page 4)

RESOURCES

(Seymour...from page 3)

With this small but representative bit of biblical background, it should come as no surprise that the Judeo-Christian traditions perpetuate the images found in the Bible, their sacred text. Consider the following selected examples from Judaism:

It is well for those whose children are male, but ill for those whose children are female....At the birth of a boy all are joyful, but at the birth of a girl all are sad ... When a boy comes into the world, peace comes into the world; when a girl comes, nothing comes....

In the prayers which the Jewish male prayed every day, he uttered a three-fold thanksgiving: he thanked God that He had not created him a woman, an ignorant man (sometimes rendered "slave") or a Gentile.

When we turn to the Christian tradition, it is enlightening to discover what the greatest of our church "fathers" have said about women:

Tertullian, a third century theologian of North Africa, wrote:

You (Eve) are the devil's gateway; ... you destroyed so easily God's image, man.

The following century, Augustine said:
... the woman, together with her own

husband, is the image of God, so that the whole substance may be one image but when she is referred to separately in her quality as a helpmeet, which regards the woman alone, then she is not the image of God, but, as regards the man alone, he is the image of God as fully and completely as when the woman too is joined with him in one.

The great medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas actually suggests that woman is a freak of nature. He says that in her there is

something deficient or accidental. For the active power of the male seed intends to produce a perfect likeness of itself with male sex. If a female is conceived, this is due to lack of strength in the active power, to a defect in the mother, or to some external influence like that of a humid wind from the South....

A final selected example comes from Martin Luther:

Should it (childbirth) mean your death, then depart happily, for you will die in a noble deed and in subservience to God. If you were not a woman, you should now wish to be one for the sake of this very work alone, that you might thus gloriously suffer and even die in the performance of God's work and will."

For centuries, then, this is what women and men have been hearing about themselves. And, having been blessed with the apparent authority of God, how could anyone dare argue the point?

Precisely because there is more to the biblical story than we have been told. Biblical images of God and of the child of God are not limited to the familiar (i.e., masculine) gender; biblical language utilizes alternative (i.e., feminine) images as well.

Note the following selected examples.

"You were unmindful of the Rock that begot you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth." (Deut. 32:18)

The phrase "*the God who gave you birth*" (or "*the God that formed thee*") comes from a Hebrew verb which specifically describes a woman in labor. I would suggest that this is an exclusively female image! Thus, it is all the more incredible that the Jerusalem Bible should translate this as "*You forgot the God who fathered you.*"

In Luke 15 we have three well-known parables of Jesus: the parables of the lost sheep, the lost son (prodigal son), and the lost coin. We have little problem getting the point of the first two. In the first, it is clear that the shepherd refers to God and the

(please turn to page 6)

A LITTLE HUMOR

Adam and Eve were naming the animals of the earth when along came a rhinoceros.

Adam: "What shall we call this one?"

Eve: "Let's call it a rhinoceros."

Adam: "Why?"

Eve: "Well, because it looks more like a rhinoceros than anything we've named yet."

A preacher who was popular with his congregation credited his success to the silent prayer he offered each time he took the pulpit: "Lord, fill my mouth with worthwhile stuff, and nudge me when I've said enough."

A gossip is someone who talks to you about others, a bore is one who talks to you about himself, and a brilliant conversationalist is one who talks to you about yourself.

A word is dead
When it is said,
some say.
I say it just
Begins to live.

— Emily Dickinson

Language is a wonderful thing. It can be used to express thoughts, to conceal thoughts, but, more often, to replace thinking. —K. Fordyce

Picking Up the Pieces, When Home Fails

by Addie Davis

Perhaps my title should be: "When Home Fails—What Then?" Much of this is necessarily personal.

The pastor who baptized me as a child was strong on Baptist beliefs, and preached on some deep theological questions which are largely omitted today. I recall as a child thinking about these truths and wondering what God had in store for me.

Much later I decided to follow the calling which I had felt since childhood. More than anything else I wanted to be a pastor, which I felt was right for me.

My home church approved my desire to enter the seminary. That was no problem. In my senior year as I was considering ordination and looking for a church to serve, I turned to where I was brought up, believing it was right to ask there first.

My letter was addressed to the congregation, as I knew the pastor would not approve. My letter went to the deacons. I received a reply from the chairman asking me to withdraw my request for fear it would stir up a controversy. Not wishing to be the centerpiece of trouble, I withdrew. The congregation was not told of my request.

It's interesting that in more recent years this same pastor wrote letters to the *Religious Herald* in favor of the ordination of women. He was a fine man and a good pastor, but not in favor of women ministers thirty-three years ago. I'm glad he changed his mind.

When your church lets you down, I believe God opens other doors. I turned to Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina, which I had attended as a seminary student. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Warren Carr, pastor at that time, and to the people of that church for their support and subsequent ordination.

I had written the Executive Minister of Virginia Baptists and believe he did try to recommend me to a number of churches, none of which would consider a woman pastor. I also wrote to North Carolina and West Virginia where I thought some church might be friendly to the idea.

Then I turned to the American Baptist Churches (Convention, at that time) and received a call to the church in Vermont upon recommendation of a fellow Meredith

Addie E. Davis presented this address on June 27, 1996 in Richmond, Virginia, at the annual meeting of the William H. Whitsitt Baptist Heritage Society. The first woman to be ordained in the Southern Baptist Convention, she was pastor in Vermont until her retirement and return to Virginia.

College student who was working for ABC. I had been offered work in the Valley Forge headquarters, but still thought the pastorate was right for me.

I am grateful for the churches which gave me a place to serve and fulfill my ministry. It has been a good journey, and I am grateful for many reasons.

It is very disappointing when your familiar Baptist family does not support your calling, but let me say there is no place for bitterness and resentment. These are not Christian reactions, doing more harm than good, and seldom change the minds of your opponents.

In returning to Virginia where I grew up I was surprised at the prejudice which still existed, and in some instances was even more deeply rooted. You know the story and how it may feel to be excluded by your Baptist family which you have cherished through the years. As Baptists we have long believed in diversity, but affirm our unity in Christ. It is sad when everyone is expected to be of the same opinion without the option of disagreeing.

Also, the autonomy of the local church is something we dare not lose as part of our heritage. One aspect of this is that the calling and gifts of women be used to the fullest extent the same as for men. Churches should be free to call a pastor or elect deacons regardless of gender, and not be ostracized for doing so.

I could have left the Baptist family and have become a Methodist and remained in Virginia, but I chose to follow my heritage.

Our great, great grandfather, Elder John Davis, was an ordained elder as they were called in those days. He helped establish a Baptist church in Amherst County and one in Nelson County and served other churches as well. He is thought to have traveled nearly 5,000 miles by horseback to fulfill his appointments and to have baptized some 3,000 people during his 40 years as a minister.

He was uneducated but wholly committed to the gospel. He is recorded in the

historical records of Virginia Baptists in a tribute written by Dr. Samuel Rice.

Such commitment was not easy for our forebears, or for those still earlier who so treasured their Baptist heritage that they sacrificed to preserve it. They knew why they were Baptist and what we stood for. Today many do not.

I note your motto for your society is: "Preserving a treasured and a threatened Baptist heritage." It is indeed threatened, but treasured by many of us. We count ourselves blessed to be Baptist even when our home folks let us down.

We are called to be faithful; we are called to serve. The servant role was given to us by Jesus. We need to follow his example, remembering he, too, was rejected by his home folks.

Success in God's sight is not necessarily, perhaps rarely, the same as success in human terms. Albert Einstein is reported to have said on one occasion: "Gentlemen, we are not called to succeed but to serve." Ladies and gentlemen, I would say we are not called to succeed but to serve, and God will take care of the results.

Each person's call is special and personal to that individual, and answerable by that individual. While others may deny or confirm our calling, it is first and foremost between us and God. On occasion we may feel we stand alone, but we do not. God's promise is still valid: "I will never fail you, nor forsake you." (Heb. 13:5a) Our commitment is to him.

You and I have a rich spiritual heritage and a rich Baptist heritage which we treasure and need to preserve. As we strive to know, love and serve God in our time, let us remember our heritage and accept the challenges facing us, despite the obstacles. The Lord can always do a new thing in our time, and we need to be ready.

The Rev. Addie Davis is retired from the pastorate and lives in Covington, Virginia

(Seymour...from page 4)

sheep refers to us, the straying children of God. Likewise, in the second parable we know that the father of the story is really God and that the wayward son is each of us.

When we come to the third parable, however, we have trouble carrying the analogies through to their logical conclusions. At best, we see this as a parable of a distraught little old lady lighting her lamp and sweeping her house in an anxious effort to locate the money she has carelessly lost.

What is actually being conveyed here? The lost is you and I; and the woman is God!

Virginia Mollenkott has called our attention to the fact that among the terms which the Hebrews used to refer to God's person and activity are these: *torah* (word of God), *chokmah* (wisdom); *shekinah* (God's presence); and *ruach* (spirit). She reminds us that the gender of these terms is feminine.

Further, in the Old Testament the Hebrew name "*El Shaddai*," translated "God of the Mountains" or "God Almighty," also means "God of the breasts."

A final example of the non-masculinity of God can be found in the book of Hosea where the prophet, delivering God's word, says "*I am God and not man*." (Hosea 11:9) What is notable here is that the Hebrew word used for "man" in this verse is specifically the word for man as male; it is *not* the generic word "mankind." This appears to be an explicit denial of the masculinity of God.

Thus, we see that there are multiple God-images in the Bible, and to speak of God only in masculine terms is both limiting and misleading. Further, to base the assumption of male dominance upon the idea of God's masculinity is entirely erroneous.

Let us now look at the Biblical images which describe God's children. A few examples suffice.

Look at the two examples used in the beginning of this essay. In the King James Version of the Bible, II Corinthians 5:17 is translated "*If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature*." The newer translations are much more accurate. For example, the Harper-Collins Study Bible renders the verse as follows: "*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation....*" This inclusive language more closely represents the original Greek, and hence, is the more accurate translation.

The second example quoted earlier, John 1:12, is translated in the King James Version as: "*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become sons of God....*" However, the New English Bible, Harper-Collins, and others are more alert to the language problem and translate "sons" as "children," again following the original Greek.

One of the most blatant examples of biased language is found in one of the translations of Galatians 4:1. The text begins with the words "*This is what I mean ...*" (New English Bible); or, "*Let me put this another way ...*" (Jerusalem Bible). In the New American Bible, however, this is gratuitously translated "*Brothers ...*"!

Finally, we turn to the creation narrative found in Genesis 2. In our familiar reading of the story, man is created first and woman last. When she does appear, she is created for the sake of man, to be his helper (*ezer*). Her creation as God's final act might easily suggest a position of inferiority, and her creation for the purpose of aiding man might indicate a position of dependency, if not subordination. Consider the interpretation of this passage from one of the leading theologians of the twentieth century:

Karl Barth suggests that "*... (the woman) is ordained to be his (the man's) helpmeet*" and that "*she would not be woman if she had even a single possibility apart from being man's helpmeet*."

However, a second reading of this narrative is necessary because our English translation does not altogether reflect the original meaning of the story.

There are two different Hebrew words for the English noun "man," and there is a crucial difference between the two. Throughout most of the narrative of the creation of man and woman, the Hebrew word *adham* is used for man. This word is predominantly a generic term, denoting a collective or class and it can thus be translated "mankind" or humankind."

The point to note, as Phyllis Trible in her early ground-breaking essay, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," tells us, is that in the Hebrew text, the term denoting man as *male* (*ish*) does not appear until the word "woman" (*ishshah*) is introduced. This is to say that both male and female appear simultaneously. Thus, to translate "Adam" as

man in the sense of male and to assume that "he" is created first is misleading. (This simultaneous creation is made clear in the first story related in Genesis 1. Note verse 27: "So God created man (*adham*) in his own image, in the image of God he created *them*.")

The last point to be made here concerns the word "helper." This word in no way suggests subordination. Indeed, the word can be used to refer to God. For example, "*I will lift up my eyes to the hills. From whence does my help (ezer) come? My help comes from the Lord....*"

Now, the point of all these examples is that Biblical translators have not always been careful to provide us with the most accurate translations they might have made. Their bias has been reflected in the words they have chosen to use. And these words are not passive or neutral. The images they suggest represent particular ways of understanding; they convey conceptual frameworks. Indeed, that is the point of this entire essay. We do tend to repeat the words that we hear ("What you hear is what you speak"). This is to say that we tend to adopt and to perpetuate established points of view, perspectives that are communicated through language.

Instead, we need to be alert to the powerful influence of words. They must be taken seriously because, in a fundamental way, they tell us who we are. It is essential that we not live in quotation marks, that is, that we do not let our perception of ourselves, whether female or male, be entirely shaped by tradition, even if that tradition is religious. We can—and we must—speak for ourselves. Otherwise, images will become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Sources: Marshall and Hample, *Children's Letters to God* (New York: Pocket Books, 1966); Leonard Swidler, "Jesus was a Feminist," *Catholic World* (Jan. 1971); Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum I*; Augustine, *De Trinitate*; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica I*; Martin Luther, *The Estate of Marriage: Women and Religion*, Clark and Richardson, eds. (Harper and Row, 1977); Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, (March 1973); *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Fortress, 1978).

Dr. B.J. Seymour is professor of religious studies at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland.

The Language of Deity

by Barbara Jackson

Is God a male? Many people believe so and have said so. Leaders in the women's movement believe that the assumption that God is male is the primary basis for the reign of patriarchy over the past several millennia. Such a belief provides the philosophical basis for the exclusion of women in religious leadership and gives impetus to religious movements such as contemporary fundamentalism.

Did God condemn women to be subordinate to men? Many people assume that is the message of Genesis 2. As counter-measure women scholars have examined the words used and have set forth a more equitable treatment of women in the early accounts of God's dealings with humankind.

What is God anyhow? Who is God? What does it matter as long as we give worship and obedience? A look at the language of deity can help us understand.

Language as metaphor

Language is not passive in expressing the idea of God. The written language, scripture, provides a record of God's dealings with humanity. We use language in prayers, storytelling, music, histories, liturgies. Language is important and necessary.

But language itself is not the reality; it is the instrument that points to the reality. Language is a metaphor.

And language is arbitrary. There is no logical reason for one sound or group of sounds to mean one thing instead of another, or mean different things in different languages.

Consider the phenomenon of twin-language. Some twins develop during the earliest stages of speech development—perhaps even in the crib—a language of their own that no one else understands. In speaking this language to each other—and it is a language—they are communicating. They alone decided which sounds mean what.

Those meanings common to one language or culture are a result of cultural isolation. And the sounds and meanings (cognates) that are similar in nearby cultures, for instance, those common to the

Indo-European or Asian language families, or the international technological and scientific terms used around the world, result from contact, borrowing or common origin.

Language itself is metaphor. Language is a human construct devised to facilitate the communication of ideas and emotion between human beings. Because language is a metaphor for reality and thought, language both reflects and shapes reality.

Language and God

In expressing the idea of God, we use metaphors to communicate what God is like. For example we describe God as father. That is to say, God is *like* a father or God is *like* a mother. God is *like* a shepherd, or a mother eagle.

Yet even as we make the analogies using metaphors, we know that the language we use is but a feeble, human attempt to bring God down to our size in language we can understand.

We need to get beyond the metaphors to what we can affirm positively. We can say the following:

God is spirit. God is beyond gender, beyond male or female. God is beyond size or time or earthly power. Since God is greater, by definition, than our human descriptions, no one metaphor can fully express God. Indeed, some attempts to depict God can confuse us or interfere with our understanding. At the very least, such descriptions limit God to the boundaries of human concepts.

In this context, objections to gender-based descriptions of God may be valid. A woman may have difficulty relating positively to a God described as male, e.g., father. Women wonder if a male god can know their heart or relate to their needs. Such an awareness can result in a sense of alienation from God.

Further, for any person who has been abused or ill-treated by a real life father, to speak of God as father may not be helpful. Indeed such use may turn a person away from a positive relationship with God. For such a person other words pointing to God may be more valid.

Yet the truth we *can* claim is that God is grace and love. The recognition that the good things of life come from God is the experience of grace. The human relationship that embodies love experiences God.

Language and worship.

Of particular concern is the choice of language in prayers and hymns and Bible reading. "Our dear heavenly father..." the opening words in prayers, may limit our understanding of God to one metaphor to the exclusion of other valid understandings of God. The hymn "Rise Up O Men of God" may say to females that the hymn does not include them. Other such instances of gender-based language are a problem.

Language in the world

Leaders of the women's movement seek to establish new standards for language in conversation, printed material. The generic he/him is a problem for females who say that the generic does not refer to them. Public discourse on the issue has led to "inclusive language" as a standard for schools, businesses and the media.

Inclusive Language

What is the aim here? What do women hope to accomplish? Women wish to widen the doors of understanding as well as the opportunities that accompany inclusion. We hope all the world will understand that God is above gender, that God is spirit. We hope the language of public discourse will adopt inclusive language that speaks of *human-kind* instead of *man* or *mankind*, and that uses plural or non-specific pronouns in referring to people in general.

A related goal is the elevation of women's aspirations—the premise of the inclusive debate is that sexist language limits possibilities. Further goals are the integration of women into the mainstream of public life, unlimited employment opportunities, and unfettered opportunity for education ("all that she can be"), as well as advancement in her chosen field and the appropriate recognition of accomplishment.

To bring it home, we hope to see the full integration of women into the life of the church—with all roles and opportunities open without prejudice or discrimination.

Recently, the claims of women for inclusion have come to the fore in national debate. We heard all around us the question: "What do women want?"

Well, here you are. Acknowledgement that we are human, made in God's image, filled with God's spirit, full of God's grace.

Barbara Jackson is the editor of SYNERGY

LANGUAGE

What Constitutes Inclusive Language?

An Inclusive Language Lectionary, Year B, outlined the standards it followed in compiling that worship resource. Using the RSV, in language about human beings they avoided male-specific language by translating “man” (*anthropos*) as “person” or “others.” Pronouns were recast to the plural. King is rendered ruler; kingdom, realm. Note the example shown of Psalm 24.

In language about Jesus, when the reference was not specifically about his male character, they used “children” or “child.”

In language about God, they avoided using “Lord” and substituted Sovereign or God. For “God the Father,” they used “God the Father and Mother.” This phrase was offered as a way of expressing the same intimacy, caring and freedom as that found in Jesus’ reference to God as *Abba*.

Note: it is important to be aware that these changes are not welcome by all. Any changes in the worship service or well-known hymns should be planned for carefully. Some hymns should not be altered at all because they reflect historical conditions. Some scripture should not be amended because of sentiment, especially if they are in the memory banks of people (such as Psa. 23).

How to Use Inclusive Language in Church

Some suggestions. Implement a conscious, intentional use of inclusive language in prayers, hymns, sermons and Bible study.

- Avoid gender-based language in sermons, hymns and prayers. Make a habit of generic, inclusive language.
- Substitute words for offensive uses in hymns and liturgy. Print an amended text in bulletins in lieu of printed words in hymnal.

- Provide educational experiences which may help the congregation use inclusive language naturally and without animosity.

- Explain the metaphor concept and emphasize that God is a spirit—not father or mother, but parent/creator, not punisher but love, not male or female.

- Choose hymns written in inclusive language. Newer hymnals and small printed collections are good sources. For instance, song collections by Ruth Duck, Brian Wren and Jane Parker Huber.

Psalm 24

*The earth is God’s and the fullness thereof,
the world and those who dwell therein*

*for God has founded it upon the seas,
and established it upon the rivers.*

Who shall ascend the hill of God?

And who shall stand in God’s holy place?

*Those who have clean hands and a pure heart,
who do not lift up their soul to what is false,
and do not swear deceitfully.*

... ..

*Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the Rule of glory may come in.*

Who is the Ruler of glory?

God, strong and mighty,

God, mighty in battle!

SOURCE: AN INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE LECTIONARY, YEAR B

The Bookshelf

Resources

on Women and Inclusive Language

Although these are not new books, listed here are some of the basic texts that describe the problem, provide a theological and biblical framework for understanding and suggest some correctives.

An Inclusive Language Lectionary, Readings for Year B, rev. National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 1987.

God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality, by Phyllis Trible. Fortress, 1978.

Household of Freedom: Authority in Feminist Theology, Ch. 3 “The Power of Naming,” by Letty M. Russell. Westminster, 1987.

Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics, “Sexism and the Language of Christian Ethics.” Beverly Wildung Harrison, ed. Beacon, 1985.

Naming the Mystery: How Our Words shape Prayer and Belief, by James E. Griffiss. Cowley Publications, 1990.

Sexism and God-Talk, by Rosemary Radford Ruether. Beacon, 1983

She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse, by Elizabeth A. Johnson. Crossroad, 1992.

The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female, by Virginia Ramey Mollenkott. Crossroad, 1991.

The Journey Is Home, by Nelle Morton. Beacon, 1985.

What Language Shall I Borrow? God-Talk in Worship, by Brian Wren. Crossroad Publications, 1990.

Words & Women: New Language in New Times, by Casey Miller & Kate Swift. HarperCollins, 1977, rev. ed. 1991.

THE LAST WORD

What's In a Name?

by Barbara Jackson

Names and naming. What does it matter? A lot!

Choosing a name is crucial. New parents-to-be consult name books to learn the meaning of names. They look back to their family tree to select a name that carries the weight of tradition—or perhaps to honor someone. Should they name her Sally for grandmother or name him Ronald for the movie star-president?

Names matter. Learning someone's name is the first step in meeting someone new. Blessed is the person who can remember names and call a person by name the next time they meet!

Would I have a different personality if my name had been something else? Many a guy has rued his "sissy" name. Many a girl has preferred a nickname that expressed her rakish flamboyance or reflected athleticism, or a no-nonsense name for a serious approach to life.

Actors sometimes change names in order to portray an image of sophistication or to conceal an ethnic past. Immigrants anglicize their names in order to "fit in."

Biblical names carried meaning. Names were consciously chosen to convey an idea or to invoke divine blessing. Ezekiel means "may God strengthen." Adoniram expresses, "my Lord is exalted." Some people were given new names to reflect new circumstances. For instance, Abram became Abraham and Saul became Paul.

The act of naming is significant as well, for naming is an exercise of power. In the Bible, the one who names has dominion. Take for example the creation story in Genesis 2.

"So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name."

Echoing the language of dominion, again (Gen. 3) we read:

"The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living."

Thus in this fallen world, the pattern of subordination and dominion of man over woman that was to characterize the patriarchalism inherent in society was established and justified in this significant story of origins.

The English word **name** and its many derivatives, such as **anonymous, nomenclature, misnomer, renown, denomination, ignominy**, etc.) find their source in the Greek *onoma* or the Latin *nomen*, and ultimately from the Sanskrit *naman* and the Indo-European (IE) *nem-*. The basic idea is simply "a designation."

Names for God.

From the beginning of time people have asked the ultimate questions. Why is there life on earth? What is the meaning of existence? This concern is universal. Every culture in every era has asked the questions and acknowledged a reality that is greater than humankind—and called this reality "god."

The English word **god** itself is derived from the IE root *ghut-* and is related to the Sanskrit *havate*, meaning call. The underlying meaning is "that which is invoked." This is the generic "god," the one whom humans call upon.

Some philosophers and cynics have said that **the idea of god** is man-made; that people worship out of sense of dependence and need, as response to the mystery of existence, to influence the natural world or to placate the god—or for fire insurance! The cynic posits that the idea of god is an illusion, a projection of humanity.

The Jewish-Christian tradition rejects such interpretations. The biblical view is that god is not an idea. **God is reality; God is living being.** The Bible does not attempt to explain God, but assumes God's existence: "In the beginning, God ..." God is the active participant. The Bible is the story of the God who makes God's self known.

The biblical understanding of God was monotheistic ... universal ... moral ... and historical with stories of that God's mighty acts.

But even accepting such a world view did not solve the dilemma of what to call God. The ancient Hebrews were surrounded by a multitude of tribal deities. What should God's people then call their God?

The personal covenant name for God was **YHWH**, sometimes translated "The Eternal." The basic meaning of YHWH was probably Being-Becoming. So sacred was the holy name it was not pronounced, and **Adonai** (Lord) was substituted. **Jehovah** as a name developed during the Middle Ages as an scribal error.

Metaphors for God. Such "name" words did not exhaust the references to God. Nor were they adequate to express what God was like. Because the idea of God as a reference to the godhead is difficult to express, human beings resort to metaphors to point to some perception about God. If you accept the premise that God is spirit, you can say that God is beyond gender, beyond physical appearance or physical attributes. Yet it is still necessary to resort to descriptive words to communicate. Metaphors were needed as the vehicle to express meaning.

We search the records for the many ways God has been described. This hymn expresses the poet's vision of God.

*Come Thou, Almighty King,
Help us Thy name to sing,
Help us to praise:
Father, all glorious, O'er all victorious,
Come and reign over us, Ancient of Days.*

And so we proclaim in song what God is like: Father... Almighty... King ... Glorious ... Ancient of Days. The other verses add: Incarnate... Word... Holy... Comforter... Great... One in Three... Sovereign Majesty.

Hymnody is a great source for the study of the names of God. Among the other that could be cited, I mention two many hymns that are particularly full of important God metaphors: *Guide Me, O Thou Great*

(Please turn to page 10)

What's In a Name ... from page 9

Jehovah, (Williams/*RHONDDA*), and a favorite, *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty* (Neander/*LOBE DEN HERREN*).

Drawing from both hymnody and scripture, we find a long list of descriptive words for deity. In an analysis of the titles we see that terms of male reference and male authority or power predominate. Titles associated with power or rule outnumber titles of servanthood, humility, and suffering. And none are feminine! [Source: Wren]

Some Words for God

Let's look at a few. First, the English word **god** again. As we know, **goodby** is a contraction of "God be wi' ye, an invocation for God's protection. **Gospel** is a contraction of god-spell, or god's tidings or good news. Other related words are **giddy** (god-like), literally "possessed by a god," in a trance, or mad. **Gossip** (god-sib) is a "god-relative (sibling)" (e.g., godmother). Gossip came to mean close friend, and only later one who engages in idle talk.

The exclamatory **gosh**, **golly**, **egad**, **bigod** are euphemisms for god used as swear words. "Bigod" was applied to crude persons who used profanity, and was used by the French as an insult to the Normans. By extension it came to mean **bigot** in the sense of prejudice against someone different. Women who have experienced bigotry know this word—bigod!

The English word **king** is related to **kin** derived from the IE *genh-* to engender, to be born. The **kin** branch is Germanic and includes such words as **kind**, **kindred** (one's

own race), **kindergarten**, **knight** and **knave**. The basic idea of **king** is offspring of the people, clan or race, and by extension a leader of the race. Derivatives of the Latin *gen-* include **genesis**, **genital**, **genius**, **genus** and **genealogy**.

The English word **lord** is related to **loaf** (bread) and means "guardian of the loaf." The root is *hlaf-* and may be derived from an Egyptian word meaning "sacrificial cake." In the Germanic form *hlaf* is combined with *weard* (ward) or loaf-ward, later contracted to *laverd* and then **lord**. We get a picture of the one in charge of his land and its produce, especially bread, the most basic of staples. The word **lady** has a similar derivation. She is the loaf-kneader: *hlafdiġe*, the one who transforms the ingredients into the edible loaf. Because of the ancient connection with sacrificial cake, by extension we might infer that the lord is over the ritual uses of bread.

The Latin "*Lord, have mercy on us,*" *Kyrie Eleison*, is directly from the Greek, *kyrios*, lord, and ultimately from the IE root *keuh-*, strong, powerful, big. It is from *kuriakon* that we get **church**.

The word **holy** means exactly what it sounds like: whole, unimpaired, inviolate, sacred. The IE root is *kailo-*, health, hale.

Majestic, **majesty** and **master** have a basic meaning of "great." They are derived from the IE *meg-* which is the source for Latin *magnus* and Greek *meġas* and the Sanskrit *maha*. Related words include **magnificent**, **major** and **mayor**, **maximum**, **mister**, **miss**, **maestro**, **megabyte** and "megabucks," and **maharajah**. **Much**, of course, means great quantity.

Feminine imagery in scripture

We can say with certainty that the primary metaphors for God are masculine. But it is not true that there are no female references to God. While God is not explicitly called "Mother" in scripture, there are a number of female images.

There are biblical references to God that describe traditional female functions: childbirth, the nursing mother, the midwife, the caretaker, the baker, the weaver, the helpmeet, the caretaker, the comforter.

"As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you..."

Other images show God as fierce protector, as a mother bear to her cubs; as the mother eagle teaching the young to fly, i.e., empowering; or the mother hen snuggling her chicks, i.e., warmly protecting.

"Hide me in the shadow of thy wing..." (Psa. 17:8).

The idea is echoed in the hymn:

*Praise to the Lord, who o'er all things
so wondrously reigneth,
Shelters thee under His wings, yea, so
gently sustaineth! ...*

Wisdom

A final female image is **Lady Wisdom**. Because the Hebrew word for wisdom *hokmah* is feminine gender, it is customary to refer to Wisdom as feminine. Yet it must be emphasized that Wisdom too is metaphor and synonym for God, not an entity separate from God. Nor does identifying Wisdom as feminine in character imply that God is female. We iterate: God is spirit. God is beyond gender.

In the Bible, Wisdom is God creating, thinking the world into being. Wisdom is the process, the way that leads to life. Wisdom is equated with Christ's work of salvation. Wisdom is the Holy Spirit, the *logos*, God's word. Yet wisdom cannot be equated with a Fourth Person of the Trinity, but is seen rather as God's active presence in the world before God's revelatory act in Christ and continuing into the present as his Spirit.

Even as Wisdom is a metaphor for God's spirit and work, however, it is one of the primary feminine images in the scriptures, and source of identification and satisfaction for women. This image models activity in the world, creation, public affairs, preaching, companionship.

(Please turn to page 11)

Names for God-Son-Spirit

Lord, Father, King, Almighty, Shepherd, Maker, Ancient of Days, Love, God of the Fathers, Lord of Hosts, Holy One, Alpha and Omega, Most High, Judge, Brother, Kinsman, Savior, Power, (kingdom of) Heaven, the Blessed, Majestic, Sun, Wisdom, Defender, Friend, "I Am," Light, Redeemer, Shield, Captain, Unsearchable, Creator, Formless, Great, Guide, High, Immortal, Infinite, Parent of Good, Star, Presence

Savior, Son, Lamb, Love, Immanuel, Life, Word, Name, Redeemer, Son of Man, Master, Messiah, Truth, Prince of Glory, Child, Prince of Peace, Friend, Priest, Captain, Conqueror, Crucified, Incarnate, Joy, One, Son of David, Advocate, Feast, Counselor, Heart, Prince of Life, Prophet, Rock, Servant, Son of Mary, Spring, Strength, Sun, Victim, Beloved, Bridegroom, Brother, Crown, Day-Spring, Desire of Nations, End, Highest, Way, Rod of Jesse, Wonderful.

Comforter, Breath of God, Dove, Guest, Giver, Guide, Counselor, Paraclete, Love, Well, Advocate, Fount of our Being, God's Voice, Father of the Poor, Word of God. [source: Wren]

BOOK REVIEW

Women Pastors

by Allison Stokes and The Berkshire Clergywomen.

New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1995.

reviewed by Alana Woolley

The Berkshire hills is an area located in the western part of Massachusetts. This area contains the largest concentration of women pastors of any area of our country. Among just United Church of Christ (UCC), 50 percent of congregations are pastored by women. This book shares with us the stories of ten of these women pastors. But beyond that, it shares the perspective of the laypeople among these congregations.

As stated by Allison Stokes, "In *Women Pastors* we tell the stories of our roles as explorers, improvisers, creators. And here we document what our parishioners think and feel about the new leadership opportunities for women, the new day that they are helping to birth."

The heart of the book is expressed in the stories told to us by ten women pastors. Each tells the story of her unique journey to her place of ministry. Reading these stories provides encouragement to us to reflect upon our own stories and to share them with each other.

The journey of the Rev. Mary Clark Moschella began in the Catholic tradition. Her first sense of call began as early as the first grade in Catholic school. By the second grade, she wanted to be an "altar boy." But the path she has followed in life took some interesting turns. She found her journey of eight years in the Southern Baptist Convention to be a liberating experience. She later followed steps to transfer her ministerial standing to the UCC. A layman, Toivo (Bill) Koylion, originally opposed her call as pastor of the Lee Church. He later became one of her strongest supporters.

For the Rev. Allison Stokes, the gender issue was put out in front. The chair of the search committee said that if she wanted to waste her time to come ahead and they would interview her. But they weren't interested in a "woman." Allison was also working in a full-time research position at the Hartford Seminary. Together, Allison and the church negotiated a trial period that allowed both to experience the situation without a long-term commitment. She has now served the congregation since January of 1988. Now some new members have come *because* the pastor is a woman. And Allison has grown to see her position of pastor/scholar as a "calling within a calling."

This book uniquely asked the laypeople how they have viewed this experience. A copy of the survey is provided in the appendix. A long chapter reviews the comments and reactions of laypeople in these congregations. They discuss their sense of male and female ministry. They call for equal treatment of women in ordination but feel that women do bring different gifts to their ministry. Discussion is presented concerning women's ministry to women, children, and men. The issues of pastor as preacher and use of inclusive language is discussed.

This book presents a wonderful opportunity for reflection by both ministers and congregation on the issue of women in ministry. It calls on us to reflect on both personal as well as corporate issues of ministry and services.

Alana Woolley is a telecommunications consultant.

What's In A Name? ... from page 10

In Greek **wisdom** is *sophia*, or *sophos*, **wise**, from the IE root *tuoghos-*. Related words are **philosophy**, **sophisticate**, **sophist**, **sophomore**. The sophist delights in argument, logic, and debate. The sophisticate wears a veneer of learning and urbanity. The sophomore has just enough learning to be obnoxious!

It is obvious that the words derived from the Greek which denote learned activity do not carry the same weighty concepts as the Hebrew. Nevertheless, it is the Greek word *sophia* that we use to convey the important ideas of God's work in the world.

The derivation of the English **wisdom** proves more fruitful. **Wisdom** and **wise** are ultimately derived from the IE *weid-* to see (truly) and therefore to know. The Sanskrit cognates include *veda*, knowledge, the Hindu sacred works. Latin cognates include all the *vide* words (to see): **view**, **visible**, **visit**, **vista**, **visual**, **evident**, **provide**, and many, many more. The Greek cognates include **idea** (from *idein*, to see): **ideal**, **ideology**, **idol**, **idyllic**; as well as

history, **story** (from *eidenai*, to know). All the words connote vision and knowledge.

Our own word is Germanic: **wise**, **wisdom**, **wizard**, **wit**, **witty**. The **wizard** was a shrewd, old man, an elder—the religious leader in ancient European religion. We think of Merlin as a wizard.

It seems appropriate that the one word for God that is truly feminine in its basic understanding as well as grammatical usage is the weightier concept—much more useful in conveying the god idea than, say, king. The metaphor for God which women can appropriate—*sophia*/wisdom—reveals the work of deity in creation, in salvation, and in Spirit-presence. We understand from that fact that we can participate in God's work in the world, that his *logos* can speak to our understanding.

We keep on digging for the nugget of truth.

Sources: *An Inclusive Language Lectionary, Year B*; Claiborne, *The Roots of English*; Wren, *What Language Shall I Borrow*; *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 1985.

Barbara Jackson is the editor of Synergy

New Positions and Changes

Maribeth Waddell Motley is children and youth minister at Rivermont Church, Danville.

Beckie Thompson is minister of music at Haymarket Church, Haymarket.

Nancy Foil has been named pastor of Baptist Temple Church, Alexandria.

Tiffany Hamilton is youth minister of First Church, Gretna.

Elise Pailthorpe is children and youth worker at Lake Drummond Church, Chesapeake.

Jaime and Mark Johnson are ministers of youth at First Church, Altavista.

Ordination

Susan Burks was ordained by Crescent Hill Church, Louisville, Ky, on August 11. First Church, Woodbridge, is her home church.

Appointments

Women ministers and denominational staff named to positions in the Baptist General Association of Virginia for new three-year terms include: **Donna Hopkins**, Roanoke, to Program Committee; **Marsha Davidson**, Fincastle, to Town and Country Churches; **Nancy Stanton-McDaniel**, Martinsville, to General Board; **Helen S. Wood**, Richmond, to Bluefield College.

October

October 29 – 30

Cousins Lectures: Dr. Walter Brueggemann, Professor of Old Testament, Columbia Theological Seminary. BTSR, (804) 355-8135.

November

November 12

VBWIM dinner at Baptist General Association of Virginia, Anne Davis, speaker. 5 pm, Marriott Hotel, Richmond. 804-744-2044.

January • 1997

January 13 – 14

Conference "Women: Shaping Leadership Strategies in Ministry," Alice Mann, consultant, Alban Institute. Office of Professional Development, Union Theological Seminary (800) 229-2990 Ext. 301.

January 18

VBWIM steering committee, winter planning retreat.

February

February 24 – 25

Ministers' Discussion Group. Roslyn Retreat Center, Richmond. For information, call Phil Bailey, (540) 675-3336.

March

March 1

VBWIM Spring Conference. Family Systems and Congregations, Betty Pugh, conference leader. 9:30 to 3 pm. Baptist Seminary at Richmond. For information, call Ellen Gwathmey, 804-288-1131.

March 14 – 15

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Virginia General Assembly. Huguenot Road Church, Richmond. Saturday brunch sponsored by VBWIM.

God preserve us from
the destructive power of words! There are
words which can separate hearts sooner than
sharp swords. There are words whose sting
can remain through
a whole life.

— Mary B. Howitt

Grace Baptist Church
4200 Dover Road
Richmond, VA 23221