BIBLICAL REVELATION and
INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

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Biblical Revelation and Inclusive Language

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Basis of Concern

Issues concerning the equality and inclusivity of women and men within society and church have raised a number of serious and controverted questions.[1] One of these is the matter of language. Common and traditional manners of speaking have been called into question as gender specific and, therefore, as excluding the other gender. Words once commonly regarded as "generic" and inclusive of both genders (e.g., *man, mankind, chairman, policeman,* etc.) are regarded by some as specific to the male gender and exclusive of the female gender. In much common parlance, therefore, language which is regarded as neutral and inclusive has been substituted. We speak now of *chairperson* and of *humankind.* Other examples may be readily taken from our common speech.

Although criticisms have been voiced about such changes in our language, by and large these changes have received broad acceptance within our society. It is commonly agreed that language evolves with societal and cultural change. Generally such change is readily integrated into our daily discourse and does not raise significant issues of belief and meaning.

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[1] This study on *Biblical Revelation and Inclusive Language* has been prepared in response to a request of the 1989 convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod that its Commission on Theology and Church Relations "study the theological implications of utilizing inclusive versus exclusive language in our teaching, worship, and printed materials" (1989 Resolution 2–12 "To Address Inclusive and Exclusive Language," 1989 Proceedings, 107). In carrying out this assignment the Commission noted the Synod's 1995 request "To Prepare a Comprehensive Study of the Scriptural Relationship of Man and Woman" (Res. 3–10), in which the Synod asked the Commission in its studies to make "use of other persons who are competent in the area of theology, including women." In view of this request, and because the study of inclusive language includes questions foundational for the topic of the relationship of man and woman, the Commission decided to create an ongoing panel of six "reactors" (5 women and 1 man) to react to its drafts on inclusive language and to other aspects of the comprehensive study called for by the Synod.

However, the demand is now frequently made also to render the Holy Scriptures in "inclusive" language through the removal of "gender specific" language and the substitution of "gender neutral" phraseology. This raises a different set of difficulties, for the Scriptures are not merely the rendering of a culturally based understanding of God. They are to be regarded as revelation whose author is finally God himself. Moreover, not only the concepts of Scripture but the very words of Scripture have been given to the biblical authors to write (1 Cor. 2:9–13; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19–21; Jer. 30:2). While the church will certainly wish to accommodate modern sensibilities and translate anew where the language of the Scriptures allows, the church is not free to alter the language of revelation. In considering inclusive language in the translation of the Bible, therefore, we must be guided by a close faithfulness to the actual text of Scripture, through which—and only through which—the written revelation of God has come to us.

B. Revelation

Although God is known through the things he has made and through his continuing providential work (natural revelation), Christian faith is based upon special revelation. Natural revelation is given to all and to all equally. It is given in creation and in the life and life circumstances which God gives to each human being. Therefore, Paul can speak of the "eternal power and deity" of God which has been revealed since the creation of the world (see Rom. 1:18–23). On the other hand, special revelation is specific and particular. It is historical and is given through human speech and through human act. Special revelation is given through the various theophanies in which God speaks (Exodus 3–4; 19–20), and it is given through the speaking of the inspired prophets to whom the "word of the Lord" came (see Jer. 1:4, 9 as typical). Moreover, special revelation is given in the election of a particular people through whose history God makes known his will and begins to effect his final, salvific purposes. The special revelation which the church apprehends is therefore constituted in the history of Israel in the particular rendering of that history given in the books of the Old Testament. Finally, God's special revelation is given in that particular history of Jesus of Nazareth in which God's speech and God's act become one. Jesus is, in the specificity and particularity of his person, the revelation of God's Word. He is the Word of God (John 1:1 f.). The revelation of Jesus as the Word of God through whom God fulfills his purpose for humankind's eternal destiny is rendered for us through the written testimony of the evangelical and apostolic writings of the New Testament. The language of revelation, therefore, is exclusively biblical, in that through the prophetic and apostolic writings we receive and possess the normative conceptual and linguistic data of revelation. This language, and not sim-

ply thoughts and ideas abstracted from this language, is the revelation which governs the church's use of language about God; about Jesus, the Savior; and about those who receive in faith the Spirit of God, through whom the Scriptures themselves were inspired. Accordingly, the church must resist demands to change the words of Scripture or to replace them with words derived from common human experience, cultural predilections, or the ideas of philosophers and lawgivers.[2]

The claim is sometimes made that the language of Scripture is merely the function of a patriarchal culture and that we are free—perhaps even required—to name God and to speak about him in the light of our own cultural egalitarianism. Such a claim, however, carries with it the cost of giving up the specificities of biblical revelation. Israel did not choose on its own to speak of God in the way of the Bible. Rather, God has revealed himself in the specific and particular events and words of the Scriptures. If the church is to speak meaningfully of a God who speaks and acts, and who in those words and deeds reveals himself, it is crucial that the church resist the temptation to think of the language of the Bible as merely an expression of cultural bias. The church must affirm that the language of the Bible is precisely the language by which, and alone by which, God wishes to be known and is known. The language of the Scriptures, therefore, is the foundational and determinative language which the church is to use to speak about God and the things of God.

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[2] A helpful discussion of revelation as the communication of God yet through human thought and speech is given by Thomas F. Torrance, "A Realist Interpretation of God's Self–Revelation," chapter 3 in *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 84–120. Note, for example, the following: "By revelation is meant, then, not some vague, inarticulate awareness of God projected out of the human consciousness, but an intelligible, articulate revealing of God by God whom we are enabled to apprehend through the creative power of his Word addressed to us, yet a revealing of God by God which is actualized within the conditions of our creaturely existence and therefore within the medium of our human thought and speech" (85).

II. LANGUAGE ABOUT GOD

A. Personal Identity of God

1. *God transcends biological and gender categories.* Despite the fact that biblical language is thoroughly gender specific and that God is personally referred to through masculine names, titles, and pronouns (see below), the Bible contains explicit affirmation that God transcends all biological and gender categories. Sexual nature was characteristic of the pagan gods and goddesses in the environment of ancient Israel. But Israel steadfastly and uncompromisingly rejected any such understanding of God. God may be "Father" to his son, Israel, or he may be "Husband" to his bride, Israel, but God is not a male deity nor biologically masculine. "I am God and not man" (Hos. 11:9; see Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:39). Typical of Israel's understanding is the prohibition by Moses of any kind of idolatry whereby God is portrayed as a creature, including a male creature or a female creature:

> Since you saw no form on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a graven image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female (Deut. 4:15–16; see Isa. 40:18–20).

The biblical affirmation that God is "beyond" all sexual distinctions has been consistently repeated by the church, and nowhere more so than during the anti–Arian debates when God's eternal and natural fatherhood and sonship were being asserted. Typical were statements such as these by Gregory of Nyssa and Hilary of Poitiers: "The distinction of male and female does not exist in the Divine and blessed nature" (Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, **22:4**); [3] "That which is Divine and eternal must be one without distinction of sex" (Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, **1:4**).[4] This understanding is clearly articulated also by Arnobius (3rd century):

> No thoughtless person may raise a false accusation against us, as though we believed God whom we worship to be male,—for this reason, that is, that when we speak of Him we use a masculine word,—let him understand that it is not sex which is expressed, but His name and its meaning according to custom, and the way in which we are in the habit of using words. For the Deity is not male, but His name is of the masculine gender (*Against the Heathen*, **3.8**).[5]

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[3] *Nicene and Post–Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, (Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1893; repr. Peabody, MS: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1995), 5:412.

[4] *Ibid.*, **9:41**.

[5] *Ibid.*, **6:466**.

As this quotation makes evident, the church fathers were not unaware that in the narrative of the Scriptures and in the language of the church's worship God is consistently portrayed as masculine. Today the claim is frequently advanced that this masculine rendering of God in the Bible is a function of the patriarchal culture in which the Scriptures were written. Biblical language, it is said, reflects cultural realities and biases which we, given the new realities of our own cultural egalitarianism, are free to replace through the use of "gender neutral" language. Such an analysis of the biblical language, however, does not take with adequate seriousness the uniqueness of Israel in the midst of the nations. The peoples surrounding ancient Israel and the believers of the New Testament commonly possessed female as well as male deities. Rather than reflect the religious language of the broader culture, the language of the Bible was in considerable contrast to the language and understanding of surrounding peoples. Had the biblical authors thought of God in feminine terms (as in surrounding cultures), we would expect that there would be some equilibrium of use between masculine and feminine language concerning God. In fact, however, that is not the case.[6]

2. *The Names of God*. In both the Old and New Testaments the Scriptures make consistent and pervasive use of masculine terminology and imagery when speaking about God. Within the Old Testament the proper name of God is *YHWH* (יהוה). More than any other designation of God, this name names the God of Israel over against the false gods and goddesses of the surrounding pagan peoples. Most specifically, the name *YHWH* is associated with the mission of Moses to redeem Israel from Egypt through the Exodus and the giving of the Law. *YHWH* is the covenant name of God.

YHWH is the revealed name of God. It is the name God himself made known to Moses. Noteworthy is the phrase "I am *YHWH*" (אֲנִי יהוה) in which God names himself (e.g., Exod. 6:8; 12:12; Lev. 18:5, 6, 21; Isa. 43:15).[7] However, the basic narrative for the name *YHWH* is Exod. 3:13–15. These

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[6] The claim is sometimes made that because God is intrinsically "beyond" gender distinction, the use of feminine and masculine imagery in the Bible possesses equal weight and significance, despite the clear preponderance of the masculine. We should remember, however, that the God who in his eternal nature is transcendent to all gender distinctions is the God who is unknown and unknowable. God renders himself known and knowable in his revelation which is canonically witnessed in the words of Scripture and fulfilled in the incarnate Son of the Father, the man Jesus.

[7] The passages listed here are typical of the emphatic use of the phrase "I am *YHWH*." Important is the repetition of the phrase in the Holiness Code (e.g., Lev. 18:5, 6, 21; 19:12, 14, 16, 18, 28, 30, 32, 37). For a full listing of the occurrences of this phrase, see Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 219. The Septuagint tended to translate *YHWH* with "the Lord" (ὁ κύριος), and this usage has come over into many English translations. However, this rendering obscures the fact that *YHWH* is God's revealed name.

verses are part of the burning bush account in which God commissions Moses to redeem Israel from Egypt (Exod. 3:1–4:17). When Moses inquires after God's name, God replies: "I AM WHO I AM . . . . Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you' . . . . Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers . . . has sent me to you.'" [8] Although there remain different opinions about the meaning of *YHWH*, the grammatical form of this personal name of God appears to be a third–person singular masculine verb in the imperfect. In any case, all terminology attending this name is masculine. For example, the verb forms which are used with *YHWH* are consistently in the masculine form: "I AM has sent me (Exod. 3:14: שְׁלָחַנִי); "The Lord has sent me" (3:15: שְׁלָחַנִי); [9] "The Lord has appeared to me" (3:16: נִרְאָה); "The Lord has met with us" (3:18: נִקְרָה).[10]

The same linguistic features occur in the narrative of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai (Exod. 20:1 ff.). God declares himself to be *YHWH*: "I am the Lord (אָנֹכִי יהוה) your God" (20:2). Again, all verbal forms attending the name of God are masculine. For example, Exod. 20:5–6 reads: "For I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting (פֹּקֵד) [11] the iniquity of the fathers upon the children . . . , but showing (עֹשֶׂה) [12] steadfast love to thousands . . . ." What obtains in these two narratives is true of the entire Hebrew Scriptures: nowhere is a feminine verb form governed by *YHWH*.

The evidence is the same in regard to other designations for God. *Adonai* ("my Lord," אֲדֹנָי), often used as a circumlocution for God's name, is a noun in the masculine gender. It often appears in apposition to *YHWH*, as in the phrase "my Lord, *YHWH*" or "*YHWH*, my Lord" (see Gen. 15:2, 8; Ps. 68:21). The designation *Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים), along with the short form El (אֵל), appears to have been a generic Semitic name for deity. Masculine plural in form, *Elohim* can refer to the many gods of paganism, such as in Jethro's declaration that the Lord (*YHWH*) is greater than all gods (*Elohim*, Exod. 18:11; also Exod. 12:12; 20:3; Deut. 10:17). Moreover, in the singular sense *Elohim* can refer to the specific god or goddess of a pagan people.[13] But in the overwhelming number of cases in the Old Testament,

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[8] In God's naming of himself, there is a progression of forms, from "I AM WHO I AM" (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה) to "I AM" (אֶהְיֶה) to "the Lord" (יהוה). For a thorough discussion of the name *YHWH*, see David N. Freedman, "יהוה, *YHWH*," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament,* ed. G. Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David Green (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986), 4:500–521.

[9] The Hebrew form of the verb in Exod. 3:14, 15 is Qal perfect, third person masculine singular.

[10] The Hebrew form of the verbs in Exod. 3:16, 18 is Niphal perfect, third person masculine singular.

[11] Qal participle, masculine singular.

[12] Qal participle, masculine singular. See also the masculine verbs in Exod. 20:7, 11, 24:8, 12.

[13] Dagon (1 Sam. 5:7); Chemosh (Judg. 11:24); Baal (1 Kings 18:24); Ishtar (1 Kings 11:5,33).

Elohim is used in the singular sense to refer to the God of Israel. *YHWH* is the *Elohim*, "the God" of Israel, and is the only true *Elohim*. Therefore, there is the frequent occurrence of the phrase "the Lord, your God" (*YHWH*, your *Elohim*; see, e.g., Deut. 5:6, 8). Important, too, is a passage like Deut. 4:35: " [t]he Lord is God (literally: *YHWH*, he is *Elohim*); there is no other besides him" (see also Deut. 4:39; 7:9; 1 Kings 8:60; 18:39; 2 Chron. 33:13).[14]

As in the case of *YHWH*, the grammatical forms occurring with *Elohim* are exclusively masculine. Nowhere do adjectives and verbal constructions in the feminine appear in conjunction with the divine names of Israel's God. This is indicative of the fact that the scriptural portrayal of God is consistently masculine. However, one might argue that the grammatical gender of the divine names *YHWH*, *Adonai*, and *Elohim* would naturally demand corresponding grammatical gender in modifying adjectives and verb forms. Such an objection, however, would not hold in the case of pronouns. *In neither the Old Testament nor in the New Testament is God ever referred to by a feminine pronoun.* This is important, for the character of a pronoun is to point to its referent. A pronoun specifies and identifies. Frequently in the Old Testament the third singular masculine personal pronoun "he" (הוּא) and the second singular masculine personal pronoun "you/thou" (אַתָּה) are used of God. Some examples of this usage follow:

Deut. 4:35:

. . . that you might know that the Lord (*YHWH*) [he] (הוּא) is God (*Elohim*).

Deut. 7:9:

Know therefore that the Lord your God [he] (הוּא) is God.

1 Kings 18:39:

And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The Lord, *he* (הוּא) is God; the Lord, *he* (הוּא) is God."

[15] **1 Kings 18:36–37:**

. . . Elijah the prophet came near and said . . ., "Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so this people may know that *thou* (אַתָּה), O Lord, art God, and that *thou* (אַתָּה) hast turned their hearts back."

Ps. 102:12 (Hebrew, v. 13):

But *thou* (אַתָּה), O Lord, art enthroned for ever; thy name endures to all generations.

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[14] An important account in determining that *YHWH* is the true and only *Elohim* is that of Elijah and the priests of Baal (1 Kings 18:20–35). In the confrontation Baal is shown to be no *Elohim* at all, while *YHWH* is demonstrated to be the true *Elohim*. Indeed, the name Elijah means "my El (my God) is *YHWH*."

[15] See also Num. 23:19; Deut. 4:39; 32:6; 1 Kings 8:60; 18:24; 2 Chron. 33:13; Isa. 45:18.

Ps. 63:1 (Hebrew, v. 2):

O God, *thou* (אַתָּה) art my God, I seek thee; my soul thirsts for thee . . . .

Isa. 63:16:

For *thou* (אַתָּה) art our Father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; *thou* (אַתָּה), O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer from of old is thy name.[16]

Common as well are the strong identifying phrases *"You are he"* (אַתָּה הוּא) and especially *"I am he"* (אֲנִי הוּא). Examples of these phrases follow:

2 Sam 7:28:

And now, O Lord God, *Thou* art God (אַתָּה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים [literally: *thou art he, the God*]), and thy words are true.

2 Kings 19:15:

And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord and said: "O Lord, the God of Israel, who art enthroned above the cherubim, *thou art the God, thou alone* (אַתָּה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים לְבַדְּךָ [literally: *thou art he, the God, thou alone*]) of all the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth."

Jer. 14:22:

Are there any among the false gods of the nations that can bring rain? Or can the heavens give showers? *Art thou* not *he* (אַתָּה הוּא), O Lord our God?[17]

Deut. 32:39:

See now that *I, even I, am he* (אֲנִי אֲנִי הוּא), and there is no god beside me.

Isa. 41:4:

Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord, the first, and with the last; *I am he* (אֲנִי הוּא).

Isa. 52:6:

Therefore my people shall know my name; therefore in that day they shall know that it is I (אֲנִי הוּא [literally: *I am he*]) who speak, here am I.[18]

This usage of the personal pronoun corresponds to the use of the possessive pronoun, and of the personal pronoun as object of prepositions. In Hebrew these are expressed by way of suffixes. For example, *lachem* (לָכֶם) means "for you" ("you" here is plural), with the pronominal suffix כֶם being the second person masculine plural. Within the Old Testament such suffixes, when referring to God, invariably are masculine.[19] For example,

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[16] See also Exod. 19:23; 1 Kings 18:36; 2 Kings 19:19; 1 Chron. 17:25, 27; Ps. 44:3; 102:14, 27; Isa. 37:16; 64:8; Jer. 14:9.

[17] See also 1 Chron. 17:26; Neh. 9:7; Pss. 44:5; 102:28; Isa. 37:16.

[18] See also Isa. 43:10, 11, 13, 15, 25; 45:18; 46:4; 48:12; 51:12.

[19] The second person plural feminine suffix would be *chen*, כֶן.

the following narrative is typical in using for God a third person mascu-
line singular suffix (וֹ-, יָו -):

Deut. 4:35–37:

To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God; there is
no other besides *him* (מִלְּבַדּוֹ). Out of heaven he let you hear *his* voice
(קֹלוֹ), that he might discipline you; and on earth he let you see *his* great fire
(אִשּׁוֹ), and you heard *his* words (וּדְבָרָיו) out of the midst of the fire. And
because he loved your fathers and chose their descendants after them, and
brought you out of Egypt with *his* own presence (בְּפָנָיו), by *his* great power
(בְּכֹחוֹ) …

As examples of the use of the second person masculine singular suffix
(ךָ), the following may suffice:

Ps. 102:28 (Hebrew, v. 29):

The children of *thy* servants (עֲבָדֶיךָ) shall dwell secure; their posterity shall
be established before *thee* (לְפָנֶיךָ).

Jer. 14:21:

Do not spurn us, for thy name's sake (שִׁמְךָ); do not dishonor thy glorious
throne (כְבוֹדֶךָ); Remember and do not break thy covenant (בְּרִיתְךָ) with us.

3. *Biblical Metaphors Concerning God.* The above evidence indicates
that the Scriptures render the personal identity of God in masculine terms.
This picture is reinforced by the principal metaphors used in the biblical
narrative to depict God in his relation to Israel and to the nations. Accord-
ing to Elizabeth Achtemeier, the Bible employs five principal metaphors:
King, Father, Judge, Husband, and Master.[20] We might add the metaphor
of the Shepherd, but our focus here is on the nature, not the number, of
these principal metaphors. These metaphors are each masculine and are
indicated to be such by the corresponding pronouns and verbs used with
them. The metaphors of King, Judge, and Shepherd are political in nature
and depict God as the Ruler and Redeemer of the chosen nation of Israel.
As Judge, God makes matters right either by exalting the oppressed or by
humbling the mighty (Isa. 33:22; Ps. 96:10 [Hebrew text, 96:11]). In the
New Testament God's judgment is exercised by Christ, whose death
reveals those who are good and those who are evil, and whose second
coming inaugurates the final judgment (John 5:19–47; Matt. 25:31–46). As
King and Shepherd, God conquers the enemies of his people and guides
them according to his will and to their proper destiny (King: Psalm 24;

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[20] Elizabeth Achtemeier, "To feminist God–talk in the Church," *Christianity Today* **16**
(August 1993): 19. See also Achtemeier's more extensive article, "Female Language for God:
Should the Church Adopt It?" in *The Hermeneutical Quest*, ed. Donald G. Miller (Allison Park,
Pennsylvania: Pickwick Publications, 1986), 97–114.

47:6–8; Isa. 41:21; 43:15; 44:6; Shepherd: Gen. 49:24; Psalm 23; Ezekiel 34; Isa. 40:11). These metaphors are especially connected to the significant theme of Israel's expectation of a king like David.

In the New Testament Christ is King and Shepherd of the new Israel. He is the King who fulfills and consummates the line of David (King: Matt. 21:9; 27:27–31; John 19:3, 14, 19; Shepherd: Luke 15:4–7; John 10:1–18; 1 Pet. 5:4). The Old Testament also depicts God as the Husband of Israel (Isa. 54:5–6; Jer. 31:32; Hosea), although not so pervasively as King. The metaphor of Husband especially depicts God in his steadfast faithfulness towards Israel, even when Israel is wayward. This imagery receives its New Testament expression especially in Eph. 5:22–33, where the marriage of Christ and the church is the pattern for a loving marriage between husband and wife.

4. *God as "Father."* That God is called "Father" requires a fuller discussion. In the Old Testament God's fatherhood is basic to the primary theme of Israel as the elect "son" of God. God's fatherhood, therefore, denotes God as the God of grace and unmerited love. In the New Testament the designation of God as "Father" becomes pervasive and this is the name by which Jesus, the Son of God, addresses God. The designations "Father" and "Son" denote directly the primary relationship which exists between God and Jesus. For that reason, already in the New Testament— but more fully expressed in the credal and conciliar tradition of the church—the designations "Father" and "Son" are understood to be revealed names which refer to eternal relations within the Godhead. The Father is God and the Son is God, within the Godhead.

Although not common, the word "father" does occur as a reference to God in the Old Testament.[21] God is the "father" of Israel by virtue of his election of Israel to be his people. Referring to Israel's election, Moses, for example, says: "Is not he your father, who created you, who made you and established you?" (Deut. 32:6; see Isa. 64:8). The narrative of the election of Abraham to be the progenitor of the chosen people and the "father of many nations" is especially important for this theme (Gen. 17:1–9). In the midst of peoples who had numerous female deities God calls Abram, whose name means "exalted father" or "the father is exalted." It is to Abram that God chooses to make his promise for redemption of the nations. He therefore changes Abram's name to Abraham, "father of many nations." Throughout the Old Testament God is the God of Abraham, so that God's fatherhood of Israel is implicit in the patriarchal stories of Israel's determinative history, even though the explicit naming of God as Israel's "father" is relatively infrequent.

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[21] Deut. 32:6; Isa. 63:16; 64:7; Jer. 3:4,19; Mal. 1:6; 2:10; 2 Sam. 7:14; 1 Chron. 17:13; 22:10; 28:6; Ps. 68:6; 89:27.

Since God is Israel's "father" by way of his election of Israel to be his people, Israel is correspondingly God's "son" by way of being adopted by God. When God sent Moses to Pharaoh, he told Moses to speak to Pharaoh the following words: "'Thus says the Lord, Israel is my first–born son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me"; if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first–born son'" (Exod. 4:23). This text of Israel's sonship is the basis for the later words of the prophet Hosea which find fulfillment in Christ: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (Hosea 11:1; see Matt. 2:15). In a related but different way, God is the "father" of the kings of Israel, who are then called God's "sons." This is especially true of the Davidic king, who is a messianic type of the Messiah to come. Typical of this theme is 2 Sam. 7:14–15: "I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul . . . ." (see also Ps. 2:7; 89:19–27; 1 Chron. 17:13; 22:10; 28:6).

The idea that God is the "father" of his people by way of adoption occurs also in the New Testament. As the true son of Abraham, that is, the new Israel, Jesus is designated by God to be his Son: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17 and parallels). This affirmation is repeated at the transfiguration of Jesus (Matt. 17:5). Corresponding to this naming of Jesus as "Son," Jesus addresses God as his "Father" (Matt. 11:27; occurs also frequently in John), and he instructs his disciples that they too are to address God as their "Father" (Matt. 6:9; Luke 11:2). Indeed, that Christians are "sons" of God by way of adoption is central to the baptismal theology of the New Testament: ". . . God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba, Father!'" (Gal. 4:4–6; see Rom. 8:12–17). The apostle Paul is equally explicit concerning the adoptive sonship of Christians in Eph. 1:3–6: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who . . . destined us in love to be his sons (εἰς υἱοθεσίαν; literally: adoption as sons) through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will . . . ." (see also John 1:12 f.; 1 Pet. 1:3). Those baptized into the Son of God become God's "sons" and have the right to call him "Father."

However, as the New Testament presumes, the adoptive fatherhood of God for us is the expression of the eternal, paternal love of God for his eternal Son. God *is* Father of the Son, and the Son *is* the Son of the Father. This unique status which Jesus has as "Son of God" is indicated in the Gospel of John where Jesus is said to be God's *only* (μονογενής) Son (John 1:14, 18; 3:16). Similarly, Jesus' filial address to God as his "Father" indicates more than the adoptive sonship which Christians have with God. Jesus is the Son whom the Father has "sent" (John 7:16). He is the Son in whom there is eternal life as there is eternal life in the Father (John 5:26).

He is one with the Father (John 10:30). He is in the Father and the Father is in him (John 10:38). He shared glory with the Father before the world was made (John 17:5). It is evident from such passages that "Father" and "Son" are not, so to speak, simply metaphors like King, Judge, Shepherd, and Husband. These metaphors arise out of the history of Israel, whose King, Judge, Shepherd, and Husband God is. God's fatherhood and God's sonship, however, are rooted ultimately not in his election of Israel but in his divine being. "Father" and "Son," therefore, designate the first and second persons of the Trinity in relation to one another. In God fatherhood is not extrinsic to the being of God. In him "Father" is not a title; it designates and specifies God's personal/hypostatic reality as Father who eternally begets his Son. Similarly, in God sonship is not extrinsic to his being. In him "Son" is not a title; it designates and specifies his personal/hypostatic reality as Son who is eternally begotten of the Father. Since the Arian crisis of the fourth century the church has insisted that the names "Father" and "Son" perfectly and truly correspond to the reality of the first and second persons of the Trinity.[22] God is not merely called "Father" and "Son"; God *is* Father and God *is* Son. The trinitarian theology of the Scriptures confessed in the creeds of the ecumenical councils requires that God be named "Father" and "Son."[23]

5. *Language Concerning the Holy Spirit.* Some have suggested that while masculine language is biblically required of the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit may be regarded as a feminine reality and therefore feminine nomenclature is permissible. Those who make this suggestion often base it on the grammatical gender of "spirit" in the Hebrew (רוּחַ, *ruach*),

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[22] The church has always understood that the divine "fatherhood" and "sonship" are both like and unlike that of the creature. Crucial for the understanding of divine "fatherhood" was that "fatherhood" was intrinsic, by nature, and personal. Crucial for the understanding of divine "sonship" was similarly that it was intrinsic, by nature, and personal. Such "fatherhood" and "sonship" was like that of humans in that it was by nature, but unlike that of humans in that it was intrinsic. Therefore, Athanasius can argue that the Son is Son of God in the sense that Isaac was son of Abraham, "for what is naturally begotten from any one and does not accrue to him from without, that in the nature of things is a son, and that is what the name implies" (*De Decretis,* 10, *Nicene and Post–Nicene Fathers*, 4:156). Yet, "men's generation is in one way, and the Son is from the Father in another." The generation of men is according to will, involves partition of substance, and results in a distinct and separate other. For these reasons, among humans, fathers of sons are themselves sons of fathers, and sons of fathers can themselves become fathers of sons. However, in God generation is according to nature, involves the communication of substance, and results in another who shares in one, undivided substance. Therefore, in God the Father is and can be "Father of One Only Son" (*De Decretis,* 11).

[23] This trinitarian understanding of God is ecumenically expressed in the words of the Nicene Creed. For primary reference, see Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, 1.21–22; *De Decretis*, 11; Gregory Nazianzus, *Oration*, 28. For an excellent discussion, using Athanasius and Hilary of Poitiers as primary resources, see Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), esp. 47–75.

Aramaic, or Syriac languages. In all three languages "spirit" has a feminine grammatical gender. It is certainly further true that "spirit" in Hebrew, when used of the Spirit of God, usually is accompanied by feminine verbal forms (e.g., Gen. 1:2; Num. 11:26; 1 Sam. 10:6; Isa. 11:2; 63:14; Ezek. 2:2; Hag. 2:5). However, it is doubtful whether this agreement is anything more than a normal grammatical agreement without any significance for any gender specificity. This is so for the following reasons. First of all, the grammatical gender of "spirit" in the Greek of the Septuagint and the New Testament is neuter (τὸ πνεῦμα), and the verbal forms accompanying "spirit" in these sources are in the neuter (e.g., John 1:32: "The Spirit coming down [πνεῦμα καταβαῖνον] …" [24]).However, whereas the Hebrew names of God *YHWH* and *Elohim* are without exception accompanied by masculine verbal forms in the biblical Hebrew, the word *ruach* when used of the Spirit of God—although grammatically feminine—is at times accompanied by verbal forms in the masculine gender. For example in 2 Sam. 23:2 the text says: "The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me." Here the word for "speak" is the third masculine singular form (דִּבֶּר).[25] Other examples occur in Ezek. 11:2, 5 where the word for the Spirit's speaking is third masculine singular of the verb "say" (וַיֹּאמֶר).[26] Finally in Isa. 40:14 we read, "Whom did he (i.e., the Spirit of Yahweh) consult for his enlightenment . . . ?" The form of the verb for "consult" is third masculine singular (נוֹעָץ).[27]

More significant, however, is the use of the personal pronouns and personal suffixes. Although the evidence in the Old and New Testaments of pronominal use referring to the Spirit is scanty, the evidence indicates only masculine forms. No instance analogous with the phrase "I am he" or "You are he" occurs with the Spirit. In fact, neither the masculine pronoun "he" (הוּא) nor the feminine pronoun "she" (הִיא) occurs in the Old Testament in reference to the Spirit. There is, however, evidence in the New

[24] In Latin "spirit" is masculine. The grammatical gender of a word does not necessarily correspond to the actual gender of the person to whom the word refers. See the discussion in Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*(Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 99–102. Waltke and O'Connor relate that in French there are nouns which are feminine in form but refer to men (*la sentinelle*, "the sentinel"; *la vigi*, "the night watchman"). Some nouns designating professions are masculine in form even when referring to a woman (*le professeur*, "the professor"). A New Testament example of this would be the case of Phoebe (Rom. 16:1). Here Phoebe is called "servant," even though the word for "servant" is διάκονος, a word whose grammatical gender is masculine.

In English, the gender of nouns may be either covert or overt. The noun "mayor," for example, has covert gender. Until the referent is known, one could not know whether the mayor is female or male ("The mayor is ill"). On the other hand, nouns such as father, mother, husband, and wife have overt gender; they clearly refer to someone of a specific gender. English also has paired noun forms which possess overt gender. "Actor" usually refers to a man, while "actress" always refers to a woman.

[25] In Piel perfect.

[26] Qal imperfect with waw consecutive.

[27] In Niphal perfect.

Testament. In five instances in the Gospel of John the Spirit is referred to through the use of the masculine demonstrative pronoun[28] (ἐκεῖνος, "that one," "he"; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7, 13, 14). Finally, although no instance of a pronominal suffix in the feminine could be located for the Spirit in the Hebrew of the Old Testament, the use of masculine forms for the Spirit does exist. For example, Isa. 40:13–14: "Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as *his* counselor has instructed *him*? Whom did he consult for *his* enlightenment, and who taught *him* the path of justice, and taught *him* knowledge, and showed *him* the way of understanding?" In summary, although the instances are relatively few, where pronominal use occurs for the Spirit in the Old and New Testaments, the masculine forms obtain.[29]

B. Feminine Imagery: Controverted Texts

Some commentators claim that, because there are biblical passages which use not only feminine imagery but also maternal imagery concerning God, these passages justify the naming of God as our "Mother." Nancy Hardesty, for example, asserts that "it is not at all unbiblical to speak of God as our Mother and Father." [30] What is to be said about this line of argumentation?

First of all, the Bible does use feminine and/or maternal imagery for God, but such usage is infrequent. Mayer Gruber argues that only four passages in Isaiah explicitly compare God to a mother, "while throughout the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures the LORD is explicitly compared to a father." [31] The four passages which Gruber cites are the following:

Isa. 42:13–14:

The Lord goes forth like a mighty man, like a man of war he stirs up his fury; he cries out, he shouts aloud, he shows himself mighty against his foes. For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained

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[28] An example of the desire for inclusive language running roughshod over the actual language of the text is the way *The Inclusive New Testament* (Brentwood, MD: Priests for Equality, 1996) renders John 16:7–16. In a thoroughgoing way it renders the language about the Paraclete/Holy Spirit in the feminine. For example: "When the Spirit of truth comes, *she* will guide you into all truth" (v. 13). The word translated "she" in fact is ἐκεῖνος, the masculine form of the demonstrative pronoun. The Greek language has a feminine form, ἐκείνη, which could have been used in John 16 had "she" been intended. Here *The Inclusive New Testament* is not an accurate translation of the text, but an intentionally false translation.

[29] There are instances in the New Testament where pronouns referring to the Spirit are in the neuter. But these instances are examples of grammatical agreement with the neuter gender of the noun "spirit" in the Greek (for example, John 14:26).

[30] Nancy A. Hardesty, "'Whosoever Surely Meaneth Me': Inclusive Language and the Gospel," *Christian Scholar's Review* 17 (1988):234.

[31] Mayer I. Gruber, "The Motherhood of God in Second Isaiah," *Revue Biblique* 90 (1983):351–59.

myself; now I will cry out like a woman in travail, I will gasp and pant.

Isa. 45:10:

Woe to him who says to a father, "What are you begetting?" or to a woman, "With what are you in travail?"

Isa. 49:14–15:

But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me." Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.

Isa. 66:13:

As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

In his article Mayer Gruber intends to affirm the equality of the two sexes with respect to references to God: "Hence to the very same extent that the God of Israel can be compared to a father the God of Israel can and should be compared also to a mother." [32] However, these passages do not justify his assertion that Israel understood *YHWH* to be "the Mother of Israel." [33] First of all, two of these passages, Isa. 42:14 and 66:13, are explicitly in the form of simile: God is *like* a woman in travail, or God is *as* a mother who comforts. It is the function of simile to compare two or more different things according to a limited, yet shared characteristic. For example, "My mother is always smiling, just like Mr. Jones, the postman" is a simile. In such a comparison, there is no intent to say "My mother is a postman," or "Mr. Jones is a mother." Each person shares a particular feature—in this case, the habit of smiling—which allows them to be compared. So also in Isa. 42:14 and 66:13, God is not said to *be*, nor is it implied that God *is* a mother in travail or that God *is* a mother who is comforting. Rather, like a woman in the labor of birth, God "will gasp and pant," that is, will exert himself for Israel's redemption; and like a mother who comforts, God "will comfort" Israel. That we do not have direct analogy, but the imaginative comparison of simile, is indicated by the parallel simile of God *as* a man of war (Isa. 42:13) and by the fact that God's comforting (Is 66:13) *as* a mother is nothing other than the restoration of Israel with Jerusalem as its capital (see Isa. 40:1–11).

Nor in the other two passages, Isa. 45:10 and 49:15, is God said to *be* a mother. In Isaiah 45 God asserts that he alone is the creator and the redeemer of Israel. There is no God other than he. For that reason Israel has no right to complain about the ways of God's dealings with Israel: "Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel and his Maker: 'Will you ques-

[32] *Ibid.*, 354.

[33] *Ibid.*, 356.

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tion me about my children or command me concerning the works of my hands?'" (v. 11). In this context, the prophet notes that the clay has no right to complain to the potter and that the child has no right to complain to its father or to its mother. In this verse God is not said to be the mother of Israel, nor in this verse is God said to be the father of Israel. Finally, the imagery of Isa. 49:15, although not in the explicit form of a simile (there is no comparative "like" or "as"), is nonetheless a simile. God will remain steadfastly present to Israel, like a mother who stays by her child. Indeed, in this passage God is actually said to be unlike an earthly mother! An earthly mother may forsake her child, but God will not do so.

The passages cited by Mayer Gruber do remind us that the biblical authors can and do adduce images from human experience which arise both from masculine and feminine experiences (see Luke 13:34; 15:8–10). However, these images do not present more than the comparison of simile. They do not denote the personal reality of God himself, any more than the personal reality of St. Paul is revealed by his statements in 1 Thess. 2:7–8: "But we were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us."

Nancy Hardesty adduces other passages which she alleges speak of God as our Mother. For example, she refers to several passages which speak of the "Creator as the One who 'formed you from the womb'" (Isa. 44:2, 24; 49:1, 5; Jer. 1:5).[34] It is not clear from her discussion whether she believes the "womb" in these passages to be God's womb. But it is clear from the Hebrew that that is not the case. In the above passages, the word for "form" or "fashion" is *yatsar* (יָצַר) which comes from the realm of pottery. The image is not that God is a mother who forms from within her womb. The image is rather that of God working as potter whose hands reach into the womb of an earthly mother, forming the child therein as though it were a piece of clay. In Isa. 45:18 *yatsar* (יָצַר, "to form") is used synonymously with and parallel to the verb *bara'* ("to create," בָּרָא). Hardesty further cites Isa. 46:3–4 as an example of the Bible speaking of God as a woman giving birth. God is said to have borne Israel from birth. But the Hebrew word here is *nasa'* (נָשָׂא), which means to "carry" a load, to "bear" a burden. It in no way refers to mothering a child.

Only one passage speaks of God directly in the image of a mother, and that is Deut. 32:18:[35] "You were unmindful of the Rock that begot you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth." The faithful stability of God as a Rock is in contrast to the unfaithfulness of Israel (see Deut. 32:4 f.). God is

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[34] Hardesty, "'Whosoever Surely Meaneth Me,'" 234.

[35] See the discussion by Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 62–64.

the Rock that "begot" Israel. The Hebrew word here is *yalad* (יָלַד, in the Qal), which is usually used for a mother giving birth, although it can at times be used for a father begetting.[36] The verb at the end of Deut. 32:18 is, however, a clear maternal image. The verb rendered "give birth" is *chul* (חוּל) and signifies a woman writhing in labor pains. God is said to have given birth to Israel with the writhing that comes with labor pains.

However, is this use of the mother image sufficient to claim that God is mother of Israel as well as father of Israel? Consideration of the language and context of Deuteronomy 32 taken as a whole would seem to exclude that viewpoint. The passage of Deut. 32:18 is contextualized by the explicit language of God as the creator and father of Israel in Deut. 32:6: "Is not he your father, who created you, who made you and established you?" Here the text has not only the explicit word for "father," but also the personal pronoun "he" (הוּא). This personal pronoun is repeated in Deut. 32:39: "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me." Even the verb "give birth" in Deut. 32:18b is in the form of a *masculine* participle, modifying the word "God" (אֵל). Thus, the mothering image in Deut. 32:18 functions as a simile, even as does the image of Paul giving birth in Gal. 4:19: "My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!"[37]

The language of the Old and New Testaments simply does not allow the view that God is a mother in parallel and coordinate fashion with his being a father. To be sure, feminine and maternal images are used of God to describe his tenderness and his love. But these do not denote God's personal reality. It remains a significant fact that nowhere in Scripture is God addressed as "mother," nor is he ever referred to directly (i.e., apart from a simile) by the noun "mother."

C. Theological Implications

If one wishes to *translate* accurately the words of the Scriptures, the language of both the Old Testament and the New Testament is clear enough concerning the terminology about God. God and his Spirit are consistently referred to in masculine terminology. A faithful translation will reflect the actual state of affairs in the language used by the biblical

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[36] The RSV rendering above takes the verb in the paternal sense, and in view of vv. 4–6 this is very likely the correct way to take it. See Num. 12:11 and Ps. 2:7 for examples of the Qal of יָלַד being used of Moses and of God respectively, perhaps in the paternal sense. Phyllis Trible refers to Prov. 23:22, 25, where יָלַד is used in the maternal and in the paternal senses within the same pericope. The Hiphil form of יָלַד is, however, the more common form for the paternal meaning (a father "begets," that is, causes a child to be born by the mother).

[37] Indeed, in her discussion of Deut. 32:18 Phyllis Trible refers to Isa. 42:14 as a passage where the birth pangs appear again. But Isa. 42:14 is clearly in the form of a simile, *like* a woman in travail.

authors. Obviously that implies as well that a translator will faithfully reflect the use of feminine simile when that is used to describe God.

However, biblical language does not simply reflect a verbal reality, a mere linguistic expression unrelated to any substantive reality. As we have noted in section I, B above on revelation, the language of the Bible renders faithfully that history of Israel and of Christ in which and through which God redeems the world and is bringing it to its proper consummation. God involves himself with this history so that the "I am He, *YHWH*, the God of Israel" is personally identified with those who are the types of the Messiah in the biblical narrative, culminating in Jesus: Abraham, Melchizedek, Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, Zerubbabel, et. al. The unity of the reality of God's personhood, of the historical narrative of the Old and New Testaments, and of the language of the Scriptures is essential if that history and that Word are to be the revelation of him who is God.

Further theological implications, however, are involved in the question concerning the rendering of God in masculine or feminine terms. In religious language which identified God as a mother, so typical of pagan mythology, the world tended to be identified with the goddess and therefore was perceived as itself divine. Joseph Campbell, the well–known expert on mythology, noticed this well–documented phenomenon: "[W]hen you have a Goddess as the creator, it's her own body that is the universe." [38] Similarly, Rabbi Paula Reimers contrasts the "inherent pantheism of goddess religion, rooted in the birth metaphor" with biblical monotheism, which is "rooted in the creation metaphor of Genesis." [39] The biblical creation metaphor expresses God's transcendence and distinct otherness in relation to the world. God relates to the world, not through the identity of body (pantheism), but through his Word, which expresses the divine will. Rather than the world being divine, in the biblical perspective the world and all creatures are utterly contingent, creaturely, and mortal. In the biblical account of creation, God—like a father—generates outside of himself. God summons the world forth by his will and command, through his Word (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 33:9; John 1:3; Heb. 11:3), and makes the world and all that is in it distinct others. Because God is not identical with the things which he has made, he is free to love the world by virtue of his own good will. That God creates the world is, therefore, the basis for what

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[38] Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 167.

[39] See the discussion in Matthew Berke, "God and Gender in Judaism," *First Things* (June/July 1996), 35. Elizabeth Achtemeier states: "It is not that the prophets *could not* imagine God as female; they were surrounded by peoples who so imagined their deities! It is rather that the prophets, as well as the Deuteronomists and Priestly writers and Jesus and Paul, *would not* use such language, because they knew and had ample evidence from the religions surrounding them that female language for the deity results in basic distortion of the nature of God and of his relation to his creation" ("Female Language for God," *The Hermeneutical Quest*, 109).

the Scriptures call "grace" and "love," the sheer goodness which wills to give favor and life apart from any "merit or worthiness" in the recipient.[40] Salvation likewise comes from without, from "heaven": "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world . . . ." (1 John 4:9). Here again the election of Israel in the person of Abraham is important. Out of his freedom and grace God *chooses* to focus and to direct his love upon Abraham and upon his descendants: God adopts Abraham and his descendants and makes them his own. It is this prevenient, free, and merciful *making* of a people that we term "grace."

In those religions where the deity has been regarded as a "mother," this biblical transcendence has been lost. When the deity is a "mother," she gives birth to the world out of her womb, so that nature and its processes and cycles are believed to be extensions of the divine. In such a world, all things are direct extensions of the divine and therefore nothing is more divine than any other thing. Life and death are but different expressions of deity, good and evil lose their distinction and thus their significance, and human beings are no more important than are animals and plants. But as Matthew Berke notes, at the very center of biblical monotheism is the denial of a divinized nature.[41] Furthermore, to enmesh God in the natural cycles of birth and rebirth renders the world a place without direction and purpose. In such a world the eschatological dimensions of the Christian faith are destroyed and with them the biblical notion of hope. However, because God created the world by will and command through his Word, the world is vested with a direction and a purpose, and human beings are invited to act in freedom in a way true to that purpose, that is, to live according to hope.

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[40] Note the language of grace and mercy used by Luther in his explanation of the First Article of the Creed: "All this he does out of his pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness on my part" (SC II 2; Tappert, 345). The *creatio ex nihilo* ("creation out of nothing") lies at the basis of such language.

[41] Berke, in "God and Gender in Judaism," writes: "In Judaism, nature and humanity emerge not as part of an undifferentiated birth of the universe, but through discrete acts of creation in which all things are appointed a place in the hierarchy of the world. Good and evil, right and wrong, are known not by reference to nature's processes, impulses, and vitalities, but through the words and commandments of a transcendent God" (35). Berke is speaking of Judaism, but he is referring to an understanding arising from the biblical account of creation.

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III. Language about Christ

Given the evident fact that in his historical existence Jesus was a man, there is little disagreement with the proposition that masculine language should be used of him when reference is made to his own particular individuality. Disagreement does exist, however, regarding whether masculine language should be used to translate certain titles and designations of Jesus and whether masculine language should be used when reference is made to him as the bearer of common human nature.

One common attempt at "inclusive" language is to translate the title "Son" or "Son of God" as "Child" or "Child of God." For example, the confession of Peter, usually translated "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," has been rendered by one inclusive language translation "You are the Christ, the Child of the living God" (Matt. 16:16).[42] Other examples follow:

Matt. 3:17:

This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

This is my beloved Child, with whom I am well pleased. (*Lectionary,* 54)

John 1:14:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld the Word's glory, glory as of the only Child from . . . the Father . . . . (*Lectionary,* 35, 48)

John 3:16–17:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

For God so loved the world that God gave God's only Child, that whoever believes in that Child should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent that Child into the world, not to condemn the world, but that through that Child the world might be saved. (*Lectionary,* 88)

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[42] All examples come from *An Inclusive–Language Lectionary: Readings for Year A,* rev. ed. (Atlanta: John Knox Press; New York: The Pilgrim Press; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986).

Gal. 4:4–7:

> But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.

> But when the time had fully come, God sent forth God's Child, born of woman, born under law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children of God. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of the Child into our hearts, crying, ". . . Father!" So through God you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then an heir. (*Lectionary,* 43) [43]

Is such translation, which intentionally wishes to avoid the title of "Son" or "Son of God" for Jesus, justified? It is not justified, and for the following reasons. First of all, at the purely linguistic level the Greek word translated by *An Inclusive–Language Lectionary* with "Child" is *huios* (υἱός). However, *huios* does not mean "child"; it means "son." [44] The Greek language has other words for "child" (e.g., παῖς and τέκνον). The desire to avoid the word "son" in fact leads to an incorrect translation, not to a legitimate option. Second, the rendering "child" is not gender specific, allowing the referent to be either masculine or feminine. It is the intent of "inclusive" translations that both genders be "included" in the terms translated. However, in the above cases of *huios* the referent is, in fact, Jesus, who was a man and not a woman. The use of "child" erodes the historical specificity of the evangelical story. The fact that Jesus was a man is in itself sufficient to explain the use of "son" rather than "child." However, as the translation of Gal. 4:4–7 above indicates, Jesus' title "Son" entitles the believers to be named "sons." Yet some "inclusive" translations claim that such a translation is exclusive of women. This leads to a third consideration. The intentional avoidance of "son" terminology is often not separable from a theological commitment to the view that the masculinity of Jesus is irrelevant to his meaning as Christ and Savior. The "Appendix" to the *Lectionary* makes this explicit:

> A son is male, and of course the historical person, Jesus, was a man. But as the Gospels depict Jesus, his maleness is not said to have any significance

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[43] The *Lectionary* is thoroughgoing in this translation option. Other examples are Matt. 14:33; 26:63; John 19:7; 20:31; Rom. 5:10; Heb. 4:14. The *Lectionary* typically uses also other strategies for avoiding what it regards as gender specific language, but in the examples listed we are interested only in the translation of υἱός by "Child" rather than by "Son."

[44] Rev. 12:5 says that the woman "brought forth a male child" (RSV). The Greek here is υἱὸν ἄρσεν. Here the RSV does translate υἱός with "child." However, this hardly implies that υἱός in other contexts means generically a "child." One would not, for example, find the word pair "female child" expressed as υἱὸς θῆλυ.

for salvation. It is the fact that Jesus was *human* that is crucial, both for Jesus' designation as the Christ and for Jesus' work of salvation.

If the fact that Jesus was a male has no christological significance, then neither has the fact that Jesus was a *son* and not a *daughter.* Therefore, in this lectionary the formal equivalent "Child" or "Child of God" is used for "Son" when the latter has christological significance, and the masculine pronouns that refer to "Child" ("Son") are rendered as "Child." Thus, all hearers of the lectionary readings will be enabled to identify themselves with Jesus' *humanity.* [45]

Behind the verbal avoidance of the title "Son" lies a conviction which denies any theological or salvific meaning to the reality of Christ's sonship. Indeed, according to this line of reasoning, that Christ is "son" is of no more consequence than that he is masculine; both are basically irrelevant. This understanding hardly does justice to biblical realism.[46] Moreover, the material from the previous section of this document requires repetition. In Christ "Son" is not merely or only a title; it designates and specifies his personal reality as the eternal Son of the eternal Father.

Another similar yet distinct attempt to translate "inclusively" is to render the phrase "(the) Son of Man" with circumlocutions such as "[the] Human One" or as "[the] mortal." The *Lectionary* consistently translates in this way, as do some modern translations of the Bible such as the *New Revised Standard Version.* [47] Some examples of this usage in the *Lectionary* follow:

Matt. 26:64:

Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Jesus replied, "You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Human One seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." (*Lectionary,* 106)

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[45] *Lectionary,* 273.

[46] The argument is sometimes made that the maleness of Christ was due only to God's accommodation to the patriarchal culture of the New Testament period. See, for example, Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 168: "[God] was entering into the stream of human life, coming from *beyond* time and place into *our* time and place. Hence he could not ignore the actualities of the human historical situation. But this is just to say that there is no ultimate reason, either in the nature of Man the creature or of God the Creator, but only a proximate one in history—and that a history marked by sin and alienation—that God should uniquely reveal himself in a man rather than a woman." However, such a view not only calls into question the sovereignty of God's freedom in his revelation but it calls into question the personal identity between the Christ and the man Jesus. To suggest that the Christ could have come as a woman abstracts the reality of the Christ from the concrete reality of the man, Jesus. Such a posture is typical of gnosticizing heresy.

[47] The NRSV systematically removes the phrase "son of man" from the Old Testament. The phrase "son of man" occurs 106 times in the Old Testament in the standard *RSV,* but it occurs nowhere in the Old Testament translation of the *NRSV.*

John 3:13–14:

No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up.

No one has ascended into heaven but the one who descended from heaven, the Human One. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Human One be lifted up. (*Lectionary,* **88**)

Acts 7:56:

And [Stephen] said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.

[A]nd Stephen said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Human One standing at the right hand of God." (*Lectionary,* **148**)[48]

The term "the Son of Man" (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου) is frequently found in the Gospels, always in reference to Jesus and always spoken by Jesus of himself. It is, therefore, a self–designation of Jesus. The term "Son of Man" without the article (υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου) is also found in the New Testament of Jesus (John 5:27; Heb. 2:6; Rev. 1:13; 14:14).[49] The *Lectionary* gives its rationale for rendering the term "the Son of man" by "the Human One": "The term [the Son of man], however, is subject to being misinterpreted as speaking about a male human being, a 'son ' of a 'man.' And so, in this lectionary, 'the Human One' is used as a formal equivalent for 'the Son of man.'"[50]

The term "[the] son of man" can mean simply "a person" or "a human being" in distinction to God or to animals. For example, in Ps. 144:3–4 we read: "O Lord, what is man that thou dost regard him, or the son of man that thou dost think of him? Man is like a breath, his days are like a passing shadow." Here "man" is equivalent to "son of man," both meaning human beings who, unlike God, are subject to death. The same is true of Ps. 90:3: "Thou turnest man back to the dust, and sayest 'Turn back, O children of men!'"[51] The plural form "sons of men" in Mark 3:28 and Eph. 3:5 also suggests that the simple meaning of "human beings" is intended.

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[48] Other examples in the *Lectionary* are Matt. 10:23; 13:37; 16:13; 27: 17:9; 25:31; John 9:35.

[49] The Greek phrase corresponds to the Hebrew בֶּן־אֱנוֹשׁ (Ps 144:3, *ben enosh*), בֶּן־אָדָם (*ben adam,* frequent in the Old Testament), and the Aramaic בַּר אֱנָשׁ (Dan. 7:13). The anarthrous (without the article) Greek phrase is probably a literal Greek rendering of these Hebrew and Aramaic phrases, which have no definite articles.

[50] *Lectionary,* **274**. In the earlier 1983 version of *An Inclusive Language Lectionary* the phrase "the Human One" or "the human figure" is said to lay aside "the strictly male aspect of the phrase 'the Son of *man*' and [to emphasize] the human connotations of the term" ("Appendix," no page).

[51] The RSV has "children of men," but in this Psalm the Hebrew is בְּנֵי־אָדָם, "sons of men," and the Septuagint has υἱοὶ ἀνθρώπων, "sons of men."

However, that in the New Testament "the Son of Man" is always used of Jesus should forewarn us that very likely the mere fact of his humanity is not sufficiently connotative of the term. For example, according to Luke 22:48, when Jesus is about to be betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, he says, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" It seems wholly unlikely that with this designation Jesus has only his common humanity in mind. It is not that Judas is betraying just any human being, but this particular human being whose significance as "Son of Man" lies in his personal identity and work. Similarly, in John 9:35 Jesus addresses the man whom he had earlier healed of blindness: "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" Clearly, in this story the healing, salvific meaning of Jesus is not separable from his title "Son of Man": "Do you *believe in* the Son of Man?" One does not believe in someone simply because they share common humanity. Jesus as Son of Man is redeemer.

In two passages of the Old Testament the title "Son of Man" has distinct messianic significance. In Ps. 8:4 we read: "[W]hat is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?" This passage is quoted in Heb. 2:6 to refer to the victory and exaltation which Christ has won for us through his suffering and resurrection. To translate "man" and the "Son of Man" by such renderings as "a human being" or "the Human One" is to overlook the distinct messianic application which such a passage receives in the New Testament. The same point is to be made concerning Dan. 7:13: "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man." In speaking of his own coming, Jesus clearly refers to this passage of Daniel: "[H]ereafter, you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64). To translate Dan. 7:13 with "I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven," as the *New Revised Standard Version* does, robs the Daniel passage of its clear Christological reference by making indefinite the specific messianic reference to Christ as Son of Man.

In considering the phrase "Son of Man" we must furthermore keep a significant narrative theme of the Scriptures in mind. In the creation account God speaks: "Let us make *man* (Hebrew: אָדָם, *adam*) in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). The word אָדָם ("*adam*") is indicated as the name of the human race in Gen. 5:1–2: "When God created *man*, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and *named them Man* (אָדָם) when they were created" (emphasis added). In the next verse, Gen. 5:3, the name "Adam" is the specific name of the man, Adam. In other words, within the world of meaning of the Bible the name "Adam" encompasses both male and female, who together constitute the human race. However, the man, Adam, is the responsible head of the human race, the one from whom all humanity derives its sinful name and nature. In the New Testament Christ is depict-

ed as the Second Adam in whom a new humanity takes its beginning (see Rom. 5:12 ff.). For Jesus to be "the Son of Man" (literally, "the son of the man") indicates his role as the Second Adam, in whom a new kingdom of God, a new paradise, will be begun. To translate "Son of Man" with "the Human One" erodes this biblical theme. It is as Second Adam that Jesus is the "Son of Man."

One can see this theme in the writings of Paul, who is explicit in his language. In 1 Corinthians 15 there is an intertwining of terms between the first Adam and the second Adam. We quote 1 Cor. 15:21–22, 45, 47:

> For as by a man (ἄνθρωπος) came death, by a man (ἄνθρωπος) has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam (Ἀδάμ) all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive . . . . Thus it is written, "The first man Adam (ἄνθρωπος Ἀδάμ) became a living being; the last Adam (Ἀδάμ) became a life–giving Spirit . . . The first man (ἄνθρωπος) was from the earth, a man of dust, the second man (ἄνθρωπος) is from heaven."

As through Adam humankind fell, so through the Second Adam, Jesus, humankind is restored. Most likely this theme is behind other New Testament passages as well. For example, Phil. 2:6–8 clearly implies a contrast between the humiliation and subsequent exaltation of Jesus with the failed attempt of Adam to exalt himself and his subsequent humiliation: "[W]ho though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form (ὡς ἄνθρωπος) he humbled himself. . . ." The point is not merely that Christ took on the form of general humanity. It is that he is head of a new humanity as the Second Adam. Therefore, those who are the followers of Christ are to live according to his pattern, not according to the sinful example of the first Adam: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5).

This theme informs also 1 Tim. 2:5: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man (ἄνθρωπος) Christ Jesus." *The New International Version Inclusive Language Edition* translates this verse as follows: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and human beings, Christ Jesus, himself human." [52] In addition to the awkwardness of the phrase "himself human," such a translation implies that the mere humanity of Jesus is Paul's primary, or even sole point. That the mediator is in fact human is, of course, a significant aspect of Christ's mediatorial role. Nonetheless, his position as Second Adam and therefore as one who in that role is a man and not a woman is submerged in the NIVI translation. Similar considerations most likely hold true also for John 19:5

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[52] *The New International Version Inclusive Language Edition* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996).

where Pilate addressed the hostile crowd with the words, "Behold the man!" (ἰδοὺ ὁ ἄνθρωπος).

The use of "the Son of Man" or even of "[the] man" for Jesus in the New Testament, therefore, very likely indicates much more than that he is simply a human being like we are. The titles may well designate his role and function as the New Adam, the New Man, through whom and in whom salvation comes and the future judgment of the world takes place. Translations which insist on generic and abstract renderings such as "the Human One" of the *Lectionary* do not allow this central biblical theme the possibility of being heard in texts such as the ones discussed above.

IV. Language Concerning Christians and People in General

Very often the Scriptures speak of people in general or, more specifically, of the people of Israel in the Old Testament and of Christians in the New Testament. How the Scriptures in these cases are to be translated is to be determined strictly by the language which the biblical authors in fact use.

A. Use of Words Not in the Biblical Text

Sometimes attempts to make the text more gender neutral occur through the addition of words not in the biblical text or through the changing of words in the biblical text. For example, some translations wish to avoid the masculine pronouns "he," "his" and "him" through the use of the plurals "they," "their," and "them" (see italics in passages below). A few examples from the *New Revised Standard Version* follow: [53]

Ps. 1:1–3:

Blessed is the *man* who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, . . . but *his* delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law *he* meditates day and night. *He* is like a tree planted by streams of water . . . . In all that *he* does, *he* prospers.

Happy are *those* who do not follow the advice of the wicked, . . . but *their* delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law *they* meditate day and night. *They* are like trees planted by streams of water . . . . In all that *they* do, *they* prosper. (NRSV)

Matt. 10:39:

He who finds *his* life will lose it . . . .

Those who find *their* life will lose it . . . . (NRSV)

John 11:25:

I am the resurrection and the life; *he* who believes in me, though *he* die, yet shall *he* live. . . .

I am the resurrection and the life. *Those* who believe in me even though *they* die, will live. . . . (NRSV)

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[53] It has been calculated that the words "they," "them," "their," and "those" occur 1732 times more in the NRSV than in the RSV. See Wayne Grudem, "Do Inclusive Language Bibles Distort Scripture? . . . Yes," *Christianity Today* (October 27, 1997), 28.

John 14:23:

Jesus answered him, "If a *man* loves me, *he* will keep my word, and my Father will love *him*, and we will come to *him* and make our home with *him*."

Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love *them*, and we will come to *them* and make our home with *them*." (NRSV)

The plural forms found in the NRSV are not in fact what the Scriptures say. In each instance the original language of the Bible uses a singular. Lost is the directness of personal application of these verses in the biblical text. Moreover, such tinkering with the words of the Scripture may introduce more serious flaws. For example, Psalm 34 contains an important messianic prediction: "He [God] keeps all *his* bones; not one of them is broken" (Ps. 34:20). However, the NRSV translates: "He keeps all *their* bones; not one of them will be broken." This Psalm is fulfilled, according to John 19:36, during the crucifixion of Jesus when the soldiers, perceiving that Jesus was already dead, determined not to break his legs. But the messianic specificity of the Psalm is utterly lost in the translation of the NRSV, which translates with the plural rather than the singular.

A similar translation technique is to change third person nouns and pronouns to second person pronouns. A couple of examples follow:

Gal. 6:7:

[W]hatever a *man* sows, that will *he* also reap.

[Y]ou reap whatever *you* sow. (NRSV)

James 2:14:

What does it profit, my brethren, if a *man* says *he* has faith but has not works?

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if *you* say *you* have faith but do not have works? (NRSV)

Again, the use of the second person is not justified by the original text of the Bible itself. Moreover, the possible universal application of these texts appears to be unduly restricted to the readers of the letters ("you").

B. "Man" as Person or Christian

The use of *anthropos* (ἄνθρωπος, "man" or "human being") in the New Testament presents a number of possibilities. Its use in reference to the person of Christ has already been discussed. However, what about its frequent use to refer to persons in general or to Christians in particular? Here

again we must remember that in translation we are not merely giving possible dictionary meanings to words. It is important that translation be governed by an analysis of referent and meaning. To what or to whom, precisely, does the language refer? Is there an underlying thematic structure which is to be allowed expression? In translating *anthropos* one needs to consider these kinds of questions.

The plural form (ἄνθρωποι) very often refers to people in general or to a group of persons irrespective of the gender mix. Traditionally, the plural has often been translated by "men." For example, the RSV translates Matt. 6:14 f. as follows: "For if you forgive men (τοῖς ἀνθρώποις) their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men (τοῖς ἀνθρώποις) their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Another example of a traditional rendering would be John 3:19: "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men (οἱ ἄνθρωποι) loved darkness rather than light . . . ." [54] However, in such contexts, to translate with "people" or "all persons" or more indefinitely with "everyone" would be altogether proper. The referent in each case is not a particular set of persons characterized by masculine gender. The referent is indefinite and non–specific and may, given circumstances, be comprised of males or females or both. Therefore, one might well translate John 3:19 as follows: "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light." Or, to take another example, one might render 1 Tim. 2:4 as follows: God "desires all persons (πάντας ἀνθρώπους) [55] to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Similarly, the singular of *anthropos* often has the force of an indefinite pronoun. For example, the RSV translates Mark 4:26 as follows: "And he said, 'The kingdom of God is as if a man (ἄνθρωπος) should scatter seed upon the ground . . . .'" Another example would be Gal. 2:16: ". . . who know that a man (ἄνθρωπος) is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ." It is clear that in both of these passages the implied referent is not one unspecified person who is male, but rather anyone and everyone to whom the passage applies. Therefore, these passages could properly be rendered "the kingdom of God is as if *someone* should scatter seed upon the ground," and "who know that a *person* is not justified by works of the law." Likewise, in John 3:27 John the Baptist says to his disciples: "No one can receive anything except what is given to him from heaven." The Greek for "no one" is *ou anthropos* (οὐ ἄνθρωπος), but clearly in a passage like this the Greek possesses the meaning of an indefinite pronoun. [56]

[54] Other examples: Matt. 5:13; 6:1 f.,5, 18; 7:12; 8:27; 12:26; Acts 22:15; 1 Tim. 2:4 f.; Rev. 21:3.

[55] On occasion the RSV translates the plural of ἄνθρωπος indefinitely. For example, 1 Cor. 7:7 is rendered, "I wish that all (πάντας ἀνθρώπους) were as I myself am."

[56] Other examples: Matt. 13:31; Mark. 3:1; 7:11; John 3:4; 1 Cor. 7:26; 11:28; Gal. 6:7.

On the other hand, in Matt. 9:9 the referent of *anthropos* is known, although in itself the word may still possess indefinite force: "As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man (ἄνθρωπος) called Matthew sitting at the tax office. . . ." Here one might well decide to translate as the RSV does, especially in light of the known referent. However, should the translator determine that the gender reality of Matthew is not entailed in the intentionality of *anthropos*, the translation could be as follows: "As Jesus passed on from there, he saw *someone* called Matthew." Such a translation would not be misleading, nor would it necessarily misconstrue the text. One might, of course, argue that once the referent is known an indefinite translation bleaches out what the context in fact makes known about this "man." This is an example, however, of the kind of sensitivity *toward the text* which a translator ought to possess when rendering the Scriptures.

Sometimes *anthropos* is used twice in a sentence, but with different referents. As examples we quote the following two passages:

Rom. 5:12:
Therefore as sin came into the world through one man (δι᾽ ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου) and death through sin, and so death spread to all men (εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους) because all men (πάντες) sinned.

1 Tim. 2:5:
For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men (ἀνθρώπων), the man (ἄνθρωπος) Christ Jesus.

In the first passage, "one man" clearly refers to Adam. Since the narrative of the Fall involves the relationship of Adam with Eve, it is evident that Adam as the "man" is the referent. One could not, therefore, rightly translate, ". . . as sin came into the world through one *person* . . . ." Here the singular does not appear to have indefinite force, but rather it has a specific and personal reference, the man Adam. However, the plural "men" in this verse does not refer only to persons who are males. It refers to all people, and therefore could rightly be translated "human persons" or "human beings": ". . . so death spread to all *human persons*." The second "all men" in the RSV translation renders simply the Greek word for "all." (There is no Greek word there for "men" or "women" or "people.") The better translation is, properly, "because *all* sinned."

In 1 Tim. 2:5 the translation "men" could well be replaced with "[all] persons" or "[all] people": "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and [*all*] *people* . . . ." However, it would be linguistically and thematically wooden to insist that the second occurrence of *anthropos* must be similarly rendered "the *person* Christ Jesus." It might well be that

here Christ Jesus is referred to as the Second Adam, as was suggested above. If that is the case, the translation should be "the man Christ Jesus." [57]

A passage such as Eph. 3:16 presents a similarly complex issue. Here the apostle Paul prays "… that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man (εἰς τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον) …" At first thought one might conclude that "inner man" could be rendered "inner person." That indeed may be the case. However, does "inner man" merely indicate the interior reality of faith which each Christian possesses? Or, might "inner man" indicate the renewed humanity in Christ which is possessed in faith but is not yet visible? Should this latter meaning be the case, "inner man" would not refer to each Christian person individually considered, but would refer to each Christian considered as a member of that new humanity held together and in common by all Christians in the constitutive reality of the person of Christ (see also 1 Cor. 2:14 f.; 2 Cor. 4:16; Rom 7:22; Eph. 4:22,24; Col. 3:9). We may debate whether Paul had such a theme in mind. Nonetheless, in its desire to accommodate the legitimate interests of inclusive language, the church ought never lose sight of the fact that Christian reality is Christological and that we do not exist as Christians by ourselves or in ourselves, but by Christ and in Christ. We should, therefore, always be attentive to the possibility that biblical statements are formed and informed by Christological considerations.

Finally, we note prepositional phrases like "according to man" (κατὰ ἄνθρωπον). This phrase, too, has usually been translated as in the RSV translation of 1 Cor. 3:3: "For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving *like ordinary men*?" However, the phrase means "in a human way," or "from a human point of view." 1 Cor. 3:3 could be translated ". . . are you not of the flesh, and behaving *after the manner of [sinful] people*?" (see also 1 Cor. 9:8; Gal. 1:1; 3:5).

C. Use of Impersonal Pronouns

The Greek has certain impersonal pronouns which certainly may be translated impersonally: "anyone" (τίς), "everyone" (πᾶς), "no one" (οὐδεῖς). Therefore, the RSV translation of James 2:14, "What does it profit . . . if a *man* says he has faith but has not works?" may be rephrased "What does it profit if *someone* (τίς) claims to have faith but has not works?"

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[57] The mere occurrence of a word twice in a sentence does not demand a similar rendering if the semantic field of each is different. Take, for example, this sentence: "The king of Siam was regarded by all as the king of polo players." Clearly the word "king" does not occupy the same semantic field in each case. Were the intention of a translation to reduce the frequency of the word "king," the sentence might well be as follows: "The king of Siam was regarded by all as the premier polo player."

Similarly, Gal. 3:11 may be translated, "Now it is evident that *no one* (οὐδεὶς) is justified before God by the law," instead of the RSV translation, "it is evident that *no man* is justified before God by the law." [58]

D. Indefinite Constructions

With some frequency the Greek places a definite article with a participle to form an indefinite construction. The RSV translates Rev. 2:29, "He who has an ear, let him hear." The grammatical form for "he who has" (ὁ ἔχων), although masculine in its grammatical gender, is clearly indefinite in referent. One could translate, "Whoever has an ear, let that person hear . . . ." A similar passage is 2 Cor. 10:17, which the RSV translates "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord." This verse could, however, be rendered "Whoever boasts, boast in the Lord" (see also Matt. 10:39; 12:30; John 11:25).

However, the grammatical construction of a definite article with a participle does not always have an indefinite reference. In Rev. 3:1 the same construction occurs with the same participle (ὁ ἔχων) as in Rev. 2:29. However, in Rev 3:1 the reference is not to anyone, but to Christ alone. While the RSV translates "The words of him who has . . . ," the more literal translation would be "He who has …" Such an example illustrates the principle that a strict analysis of referent is crucial for determining correct and allowable translations.

E. References to "Brother"

Some gender neutral translations attempt to find gender neutral equivalents for the word "brother" (ἀδελφός). For example, the common translation of Matt. 18:15, found in the RSV, is "If your *brother* sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone." This becomes in the *New Revised Standard Version* "If another *member of the church* sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone." Although Matt. 18:15 applies to all Christians, male and female, "member of the church" is not an accurate translation of this biblical text. Furthermore, the

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[58] However, it is not always so easy to rid a translation of grammatical masculine forms. Take, for example, John 14:23: "Jesus answered him, 'If a man (τίς) loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him (αὐτόν), and we will come to him (πρὸς αὐτόν) and make our home with him (παρ᾽ αὐτῷ)." While τίς can be translated with "whoever," the following masculine pronouns in the translation render Greek pronouns in the grammatical masculine gender. Clearly they do not denote males only, but denote the indefinite referent indicated by τίς. One could follow the strategy of the NRSV, which translates with plurals: ". . . my Father will love *them*, and we will come to *them* and make our home with *them*." Again, however, that is not an accurate translation of the Greek pronouns in the text, which are singular. One could opt for this inelegant translation: ". . . my Father will love *him/her*, and we will come to *him/her* and make our home with *him/her*." The proper sense is there, but as a text to be *read*, the Scriptures translated in that way would become ponderous.

NRSV translation projects the modern notion of church membership into the text, involving the reader in a historical anachronism.

In Luke 17:3 the NRSV substitutes the word "disciple" for "brother": "If another *disciple* sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive." However, Greek has a word for "disciple" (μαθητής), and that word does not appear in the text of Luke 17:3. Furthermore, the relationship denoted by "brother" is different from the relationship denoted by "disciple." "Brother" suggests a horizontal relationship of equality and mutual care. "Disciple" suggests a relationship to a teacher or master. This may be why the NRSV adds the word "another," even though there is no such word in the Greek text. However, the familial intimacy suggested by the term "brother" is lost in the rendering "another disciple." The Greek word is correctly translated by "brother."

However, just as the plural *anthropoi* (ἄνθρωποι, "men") often refers without gender specificity to a group of persons, so also the plural *adelphoi* (ἀδελφοί, "brothers") sometimes may mean "brothers and sisters," and the translator should be sensitive to those instances where the context makes clear that the author is referring to both men and women.[59] One such instance may be 1 Cor. 15:1: "Now I would remind you brethren (ἀδελφοί) in what terms I preached to you the gospel . . . ." Here the plural very likely refers to the Christians at Corinth quite apart from any intended gender differentiation. Therefore, the translation "I made known to you, brothers and sisters, the gospel which I preached to you" may better capture the meaning of the word. On the other hand, in Acts 7:2 *adelphoi* is clearly to be translated "brothers." Stephen addresses the Sanhedrin with the introductory words, "Men, brothers, and fathers" (ἄνδρες ἀδελφοὶ καὶ πατέρες).

F. Christians as "Children"

Often (especially in the Johannine literature) Christians are designated as "children" of God (John 1:12). This is a correct translation of the Greek τέκνα θεοῦ. However, such usage is not justification for translating with "children of God" when in fact the Greek speaks of Christians by the designation "sons of God" (υἱοὶ θεοῦ). In Gal. 3:26, for example, the text reads, "for in Christ Jesus you are all *sons of God*, through faith." In such instances, the actual language of the Scriptures ought to guide and determine the way we translate and read.

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[59] Regarding the importance of context in determining the meaning of a word, one might point to Paul's speech in Athens in Acts 17. Paul addresses his remarks to the "*men* (ἄνδρες) of Athens" (v. 22), but in verse 34, included in "some *men* (τινὲς ... ἄνδρες)" who "joined him" is a *woman* by the name of Damaris.

G. Inclusive Feminine Language

As is indicated above, the Scriptures use inclusive language which is masculine when the significant referent is Adam or Christ. However, it is important to note that the Scriptures also use inclusive language which is feminine, most significantly when referring to Israel or to the church in its relation to God or to Christ. For example, the Old Testament depicts God as the Husband to Israel, and correspondingly depicts Israel as the bride of God (Isa. 54:4–8; Jer. 31:32; Ezek. 16:32; Hosea 1–3). In the New Testament this relationship is depicted especially by Paul in Eph. 5:22–33. Here Christ is said to be the Bridegroom of the church, his bride. In this reality of Christ's bride, both Christian men and Christian women are included, but translations should preserve this feminine language and imagery by using "bride," "wife," etc., rather than generic terms. In this instance the inclusive language, although female, includes both male and female. The habit of the Bible to speak inclusively while using gender specific language should alert us to the fact that biblical language is not merely the expression of social and cultural conventions of the ancient world, but rather is expressive of a meaning and of a significance which is truly biblical. That is, such language is the language of God's revelation, which he wishes us to know and to ponder and to respect.

V. Summary

A. General Principles

1. God's actions in history recorded in the Old Testament and New Testament (including the results of those actions in the institutions of Israel, the configuration of its kingship, the apostles who were called, etc.) are normative and revelatory, and are not to be seen as essentially a product of a given culture or captive to it.

2. Biblical language reflects reality and is itself also revelatory.

3. The actual biblical text in the original languages is normative and must be respected.

4. Biblical reality is Christological and informs linguistic formulations in the Scriptures.

B. Practical Conclusions

1. General
   a. Statements about God and Jesus in the Scriptures cannot be dismissed as "culture–bound" simply because such statements are not congruent with contemporary thought and practice.
   b. While all translations and formulations must be able to be understood by contemporary hearers/readers, such understanding must be subservient to a faithful rendering of the biblical text.
   c. The masculine language and imagery which the Scriptures use for God is purposeful and therefore must not be neutralized, even to make it more accessible to contemporary interpreters.
   d. When used of the people of God, both masculine imagery ("sons") and feminine imagery ("bride") are inclusive.

2. Specific
   a. The first person of the Trinity is to be addressed as "Father" rather than as "Parent" or "Mother."
   b. Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, is to be seen and addressed as the "Son of God" and not as the "Child of God."

c. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, is not to be understood as a feminine principle in the Godhead and/or described with feminine pronouns (as "she" or "her").

d. Feminine similes for God occur in the Scriptures, albeit rarely, and may also be used in appropriate ways.

e. Where the Scriptures describe Christians as *huoi theou* (υἱοὶ θεοῦ), the expression should be rendered into English as "sons of God." While certain passages—especially in the Johannine writings—describe Christians as "children of God" (τέκνα θεοῦ), that formulation is normative only within its specific context.

f. As a general rule, the person and number of biblical statements should be respected. Thus, singulars should not become plurals and third person statements should not become second person statements.

g. Latitude exists in the understanding and rendering of *adelphoi* (ἀδελφοί), "brothers," and *anthropoi* (ἄνθρωποι), "men." When these words have a general referent (e.g., a mixed group or Christians in general), translations such as "brothers and sisters" (for ἀδελφοί) and "people" (for ἄνθρωποι) may well be appropriate. In view of the sensitivity of many, also within Christian audiences, to issues of gender inclusivity in the use of language, the use of such plurals in the text may offer opportunity through translation to ensure that both women and men are clearly included in the presentation. Christian concern suggests that in sermons, Bible classes, and other presentations one must be sensitive to the concerns of all hearers. It demonstrates Christian care to communicate in a way that makes certain both women and men are included in the presentation.

h. The feminine imagery in the Scriptures for the people of God (Israel, the church) must be respected and should not be neutralized. Thus, for example, the church is the "bride" of Christ and not simply his "spouse."