



# The Paternal Face and the Maternal Mind of Yahweh<sup>1</sup>

ERHARD S. GERSTENBERGER

*Philipps University  
Marburg, Germany*

## I. FACE AND HEART

**W**HAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE SPEAK OF THE “PATERNAL FACE” AND “MATERNAL mind” of Yahweh? Does God’s outward appearance correspond to male features, while God’s inner condition is attuned to female experience? Are outside and inside like the two sides of a coin which belong together but (according to a German proverb) never meet, thus constituting a metaphor of non-reconciliation or blunt contradiction?

I frankly do not think so. To my knowledge, not a single passage in the Hebrew Scriptures suggests such a dichotomy or polarity within God (or any other person). In fact, when we read that “Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell” (Gen 4:5), we know immediately that the outward appearance of this charac-

<sup>1</sup>An earlier form of this address was delivered by Professor Gerstenberger at Luther Seminary on November 1, 1995.

*Until his retirement in October 1997, ERHARD S. GERSTENBERGER held a chair for Old Testament literature and theology at Marburg. He has been a parish pastor and has taught at Yale Divinity School and at the Lutheran seminary in São Leopoldo, Brazil. Recent publications in English include a commentary on Leviticus (Westminster, 1996) and a study of patriarchy in the Old Testament, Yahweh the Patriarch (Fortress, 1996).*

*Ancient notions of work and family, gender roles and sexuality significantly shaped our inherited images of God. A theology for today’s church must reexamine those images in the light of present social realities.*

ter, who is about to slay his own brother, corresponds exactly to his inner feelings. Other passages that deal with heavy emotions never claim that faces remained calm (e.g., 2 Sam 18:33; Jer 4:19; 15:15-18; Psalm 38). The Israelites of old were no stone-faced masters of their feelings. References to God's heart or mind (לֵב) or God's face (פָּנִים) never mean to establish a polarity, to pit one against the other. For example, when Yahweh announces, "My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender" (Hos 11:8), the strong internal feelings are followed immediately by appropriate external action: Yahweh will not "execute" his "fierce anger" but contains his indignation, allowing mercy to prevail (Hos 11:9). Similarly, the divine threat "I will set my face against them and against their family, and will cut them off from among their people" (Lev 20:5; cf. v. 3; Lev 26:17) accords completely with the text's prevailing mood of punishment. While the Aaronic blessing speaks only of Yahweh's face, it clearly intends no cleavage between face and mind:

Yahweh make his face to shine upon you,  
and be gracious to you;  
Yahweh lift up his countenance upon you,  
and give you peace. (Num 6:25-26)

Obviously, this good and life-preserving blessing flows from the heart; it is communicated or mediated through God's glorious face or countenance.

*Conclusion 1: We must be careful not to read our own antagonisms into ancient writings, thereby ascribing to God some of our own schizophrenic mentality. Rather, acknowledging the relativity of human discourse about God, we are liberated (in Christ!) to look at diverse and even contradictory theological affirmations (coming perhaps from antagonistic groups) as nothing but individual stones that together comprise a fuller mosaic of the transcendent Divine.*

## II. GENDERING THE DIVINE

Nowhere do the Hebrew Scriptures (or, to my knowledge, any other ancient near eastern texts) make the maleness or femaleness of divine beings an explicit topic of debate or reflection. They speak thematically of God's power, mercy, or the propriety of God's actions, but never of God's gender per se. This fact leads me to the conclusion that everything in the ancient world related to sex roles and gender appearance in the divine realm was copied more or less unconsciously from human experience. Gender talk penetrated theological discourse with no particular agenda.

Still, we may ask about the implicit or underlying guidelines that informed ancient talk about the gods and their assumed gender roles or sexual nature. A broad examination of the biblical and ancient non-biblical records reveals that anthropomorphisms were applied to deities in a less rigid and literal way than is customary in human experience. The theological affirmations we know from ancient times seem to aim at qualities and capabilities *beyond* human experience when speaking of divine beings in human terms: Gods are humans plus *x*, we

might say. This is one basic way of doing theology. The unknown factor may approach the infinite and even contradict the finite; nevertheless, it remains a human estimation out of a human perspective. In relation to sex and gender this means that ancient deities were believed to exceed and transform the productive nature of human beings. Thus, in mythological imagery there seems to be little difficulty in attributing both female and male procreative capacities to individual gods.<sup>2</sup> Also, as Phyllis Tribble has pointed out, the ancient Israelites apparently did not hesitate to include female compassion, wisdom, and strength into the very person of a basically male deity.<sup>3</sup> The beautiful assertion of Ps 103:13 resounds in Sunday school services: "As a father has compassion for his children, so Yahweh has compassion for those who fear him." In the light of what we said earlier about the inside and outside of God, we should not postulate in this verse a mere absorption of female values into the male deity. Rather, it shows a strange capacity to picture a male deity acting out a female nature.

If the sexual natures of the divine beings were easily interchangeable, so apparently were their gender roles. Just as daily choruses of human males and females were of little importance to superior beings,<sup>4</sup> the boundaries established between the sexes on earth were not binding in the heavenly realm. Gods and goddesses quite often performed parallel feats of power and geniality. Baal and Anat, as known from the Ugaritic texts, are a case in question, or Marduk and Ishtar (Inanna). Both Inanna and Anat, the virgin consort of Baal herself, are able to fight battles with unmatched ferocity, wading in blood to their ankles.<sup>5</sup> Neat delineations of gender roles, designed in the human world, are not necessarily effective among divine beings. In fact, ancient near eastern mythology does not pay particular attention to procreative powers and sexual desires among the gods in heaven, except for ritual purposes. The sacred marriage rite celebrated at the New Year's festivities was a very important piece of cosmic vivification. This event, however, served not the gods but the maintenance of nature and humanity. Sexuality was directed outward, not an act of self-preservation as among humans. Of course sexuality among the gods is a reflection of human experience; but most often it is construed differently from sexuality in human experience: it serves to benefit an outward clientele, namely, all living beings on earth.

The latter point applies, in a certain way, also to Yahweh. Insofar as he is viewed in the Hebrew Scriptures as a "sexual" being—bridegroom, husband, father, betrayed lover, etc. (cf. especially the relevant passages in Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Third Isaiah)—his metaphorical sexuality is outwardly directed. I

<sup>2</sup>Judith Ochshorn, *The Female Experience and the Nature of the Divine* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1981).

<sup>3</sup>Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

<sup>4</sup>This is true already in the royal household where menial work was done by slaves. According to *Enuma Elish*, a Mesopotamian epic of creation, such work was always to be relegated to a lower strata in the cosmic hierarchy, be it inferior gods or human beings.

<sup>5</sup>Helgard Balz-Cachois, *Inanna: Wesensbild und Kult einer unmütterlichen Göttin* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1992).

believe that ancient narrators, poets, and preachers liked to play with a possible sexual identity of their gods. They could identify better with them by imagining them in analogous roles. But they also felt, I am sure, the otherness of the divine being. This made them use sexual language with caution—in a non-direct and non-essential way.

On the whole, however, the Hebrew Scriptures heavily emphasize male characteristics, functions, and values when talking about Yahweh or other gods. Female “ingredients” are sparse and, at times, secondary, even though one passage does compare Yahweh with a mother (Isa 66:13: “As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you”) and another implicitly with a midwife (Ps 22:9: “It was you who took me from the womb”—surely a woman’s task). Overwhelmingly, though, God is portrayed as a He, with most titles, attributes, and performances gleaned from such male worlds as the military, law, politics, economics, architecture, and hunting. Metaphors from female occupations are fairly rare in Hebrew theological language. Household activities, child care, gardening, or weaving apparently did not greatly impress the male transmitters of the tradition. One beautiful counterexample, however, has been rediscovered by Helen Schüngel-Straumann—one that had been painted over by indignant male traditionalists. That Hos 11:1-4 is dealing with child care has always been conceded. Yahweh takes care of his little son, Ephraim:

When Israel was a child, I loved him  
and out of Egypt I called my son....  
[I]t was I who taught Ephraim to walk,  
I took them up in my arms,  
but they did not know that I healed them.  
I led them with cords of human kindness,  
with bands of love.  
I was to them like those  
who lift infants to their cheeks.  
I bent down to them and fed them. (NRSV)

The NRSV translation is already pretty good, giving Yahweh the full role of a loving father who takes children up in his arms and feeds them. In ancient days this was probably female behavior, looked upon with disdain in male society. But there is one line, translated literally in the RSV (“who eases the yoke on their jaws,” instead of “who lift infants to their cheeks”; v. 4), which yields a surprising picture in Helen Schüngel-Straumann’s translation (after she has changed one single vowel—Hebrew עָל, baby, for עֹל, yoke): “who puts the babe to her breasts.”<sup>6</sup> This makes Yahweh a true motherly figure. Very probably, there was much more female talk about God in ancient Israel than we can now possibly deduce from the extant writings.

*Conclusion 2: The evidence from the Hebrew Scriptures and, I assume, from much of ancient near eastern literature does not permit us to speak of a direct transfer of human*

<sup>6</sup>Helen Schüngel-Straumann, “Gott als Mutter in Hosea 11,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 166/2 (1986) 119-134.

sexuality and gender roles into theological discourse. Language of sex and gender, although clearly taken from human experience, was used metaphorically, allowing for deviating patterns on the divine side. Yahweh is portrayed in various gender roles, frequently as the male partner of Israel (e.g., Hos 2:2-15; Jer 2:2; 3:6-10; Ezekiel 16; 23; Isa 62:4-5), but there are also traditions depicting him as mother (Hos 11:1-4; Isa 66:13).

### III. PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURES

We cannot leave the problem of gender at a conceptual or abstract level. We have to probe into its concrete social moorings and take into account the structures of ancient Hebrew society. We do so with the assumption that theological ideas are always based in or connected to human social and psychic experience. This is not to say that our thinking and talking about God is simply a projection into heaven of human ideas, as Ludwig Feuerbach has put it. Rather, our talk about God is genuine response to God—the transcendent One, the “Ground of Being” or “Being Itself” (Paul Tillich), or however we might name Him or Her or It. But in our response, whatever it is, we use the concepts available to us as human beings, because we simply do not have other ones. Our concepts, then, are and can be only metaphors, images, or likenesses of the Divine. We are able to picture the absolute only in terms of the finite, that is, in terms of our little, transitory human world. Most theologians are fully aware of this. John Calvin put it into the formula: *Finitum non capax infiniti* (the finite is not able to take in or express the infinite). Martin Luther wrestled with the disconcerting insight that the *deus absconditus* (hidden God) really was unfathomable and unaccountable. Pedro Casaldaliga in Brazil put it this way: “God’s universal word speaks only the vernacular.”

What this means is that everything we say about God is deeply tinged, to say the least, by our notions of the world, especially as they derive from social structures, cultural and religious conditionings, and personal status and experience. Obviously, Israel and her neighbors, the people of ancient times, were in the same predicament. What kind of society do we imagine prevailed in the region where the Hebrew Scriptures had their origin? For the purposes of this essay, we must ask that question particularly in regard to gender roles. In response, we must admit that, despite the changes that occurred over the millennia, societies all over the ancient near east remained fundamentally patriarchal. Moreover, in sharp contrast to our own times, which are hypnotized by the supreme value of the individual, the old patriarchal worldviews (prior to the exile in Israel) gave primary value to collective entities like family, clan, tribe, city, and nation. The family was led by the strongest (oldest?) male. Villages and towns were governed by councils of male elders. As a rule, national states had a king as their head, while nomadic people followed their sheikh. Temples and cultic institutions usually had a male administration. (There were, however, priestesses in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and probably in Syria.) Virtually all public life was under the control of males, prominently so the military, state bureaucracy, juridical affairs, and commerce. Women became active in public affairs, it seems, only in time of emergency (cf. Judges 4-5: Deborah; 1 Samuel 25: Abigail).

Women's place of prestige and authority (in preexilic times) was inside the house and garden. Procreation, housekeeping, child-rearing and educational activities, family organization and sustenance depended exclusively on women. And given the different structure of society at that time (family being the cornerstone of all human existence), women contributed indispensable services, maintaining the small social group. And, unlike the situation in industrial societies, the role of women was recognized and highly respected. We may assume, in fact, that in older Israelite society, women held a status almost equal to that of men.<sup>7</sup> No one in Israel during that period could have imagined a family without the active role of women. And since families were absolutely essential to keep individuals alive (males included), female roles and female sentiments received considerable attention.

The roles of women and men within the tribal family seem to have balanced each other in a bipolar way. Working in different areas, divided according to gender lines and separated from one another by taboos (Indian tradition has it, for example, that men must not look into cooking pots, and women are not allowed to touch hunting equipment), the group as a whole still depended on the positive results of all gendered activities. Work in the garden and work with the herds, procreation of children and protection against enemies, construction of houses and manufacture of clothing—all these endeavors were required to make possible the survival of the group. Thus female and male undertakings, diverse as they were, together served the common good. Theologically, this meant that it was nearly impossible to describe God unilaterally from male experience, since that experience accounted for barely half of the life-sustaining reality of the ancient world. Even male theologians lived in a world sustained and ordered by women. We may assume that these men were not isolated singles, eremites, or lone wolves. They belonged to their families and worked with them as fully integrated members. In other words, collective experience, growing out of a group's struggle for survival—even in a sexually polarized environment and under male leadership—cannot produce an exclusively male-oriented theology.

There is one more weighty argument in favor of this kind of reconstruction of Israel's preexilic past. The Old Testament reveals surprising information about the vital importance of women in preexilic families. There are numerous indications that women played an active or dominant role in familial or domestic cults. The textual evidence (cf. the domestic idols or teraphim in Exod 21:6; Gen 31:30-35; 1 Sam 19:13-17; the service to the queen of heaven, directed by women, in Jer 44:15-19) is corroborated by archaeological evidence unearthed in Israelite living areas (figurines, small altars, incense stands, etc.) and by a few inscriptions, discovered as late as 1976, that mention "Yahweh and his Asherah" as two distinct deities (or at least Yahweh accompanied by a sacral symbol representing the female part of reality). Moreover, twice in the Hebrew Scriptures we find archaic reminis-

<sup>7</sup>See Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve* (New York: Oxford University, 1988).

cences of a type of female priesthood, learning of women who “served [with mirrors] at the entrance to the tent of meeting” (Exod 38:8; 1 Sam 2:22).<sup>8</sup>

*Conclusion 3: Early Israelite conceptions of Yahweh included a bold consciousness of God’s responsiveness to a dual human reality. Human beings were conditioned by their sexuality—this was a basic fact. But as females and males they formed a complex and inter-related unity. The God of Israel related to this unity through the priestly offices of both sexes.*

#### IV. DEVALUATION OF FEMALE EXPERIENCE

The picture thus far looks bright and beautiful, at least for the preexilic period. But ancient reality was not as harmonious as it once seemed—a fact we have come to appreciate especially since modern women, with their experience of discrimination, began to reread and scrutinize the scriptures. Division of labor and authority into outward (public) and inward (familial) zones, with concomitant attributions of gender characteristics and mutual exclusions, has always tended to tilt the balance in favor of males. Male authority in the public sphere meant that women were more or less automatically excluded from law, politics, official religion, and much of the economy (though in Prov 31:14-18, 24, it is still the woman who does the trading). Public responsibilities confer power upon those who exercise them, and such power is derived from the conventions valid in the larger society. The increasing importance of the wider society and the general weakening of family autonomy in later Israelite history gave rise to the dominion of males over females. The brunt of this growing imbalance was already felt by the authors of Gen 3:16 who somewhat regretfully, I think, included this phrase in the curse over womankind: “He (your husband) shall rule over you”—using the strong authoritarian word *נָשַׁל* to denote this (deplorable?) fact. A closer look at diverse Hebrew texts reveals that females (daughters, wives, concubines, slaves, widows, prostitutes, aunts, etc.) were always in danger of being treated like minors or even like merchandise and sacrificial objects (the worst examples being the concubine of the Levite in Judges 19 and the daughter of Jephthah in Judg 11:29-40).<sup>9</sup> The imagery employed in Ezekiel 16 and 23 is quite sobering at this point. Later developments (of the exilic and post-exilic periods) further aggravated the burden of women in Israel.

There were, then, real and not only apparent disadvantages in being born a woman in ancient times. These disadvantages tended to increase dramatically during the latter part of the Old Testament period. The loss of state institutions, the breakup of family estates, the heavy levies and taxes imposed upon the defeated Judahites by victorious Babylonians and Persians (cf. Nehemiah 5)—these and

<sup>8</sup>The material in this paragraph is elaborated at length in my book *Yahweh the Patriarch* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

<sup>9</sup>Phyllis Tribble has dedicated a book to these *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); a recent dissertation investigates the use and abuse of daughters by fathers in biblical times: Elke Seifert, “Die Verfügungsgewalt der Väter über ihre Töchter im Alten Testament” (Dr. theol. diss., University of Marburg, 1996); forthcoming from Neukirchener Verlag.

other factors contributed considerably to the weakening of female status. Where the family unit lost its autonomy and life-preserving power, wives, mothers, and daughters were the ones who bore the heaviest burden. This social rule has remained mercilessly effective into our own day and our own societies (consider the state of families in the slum areas of our big cities).

As ancient Israel transformed itself into a free religious community without the support of state institutions, religious conceptions changed as well. Faith in Yahweh, designed and administered by male leadership, was narrowed to include only male dimensions and became strictly exclusive. There was no other name or power than that of the liberating God of old that could guarantee the survival, cohesion, and solidarity of the dispersed people. This concentration on the one saving deity, necessary and effective as it may have been for the preservation of the community, did at the same time ostracize formerly legitimate religious worship, blaming it for the downfall of Judah. (Interestingly, the women of Jer 44:18 invert the charge: "From the time we stopped making offerings to the queen of heaven and pouring out libations to her, we have lacked everything and have perished by the sword and by famine.") The leaders who organized the communities in the diaspora and those back in Palestine were male, almost "naturally" so, because general societal responsibilities were in the hands of males. One may suspect, however, that there remained a strong female opposition. This can still be seen in texts like Num 12:2 where Miriam (and Aaron) protest, "Has Yahweh spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" But the male leadership insisted on Moses alone and cut Miriam out of the sacred tradition (there is a very slim trace left in Mic 6:4; cf. Exod 15:20-21). As males brought up in the tradition of Yahweh as a warrior-god—possibly, in their understanding, a "loner," unattached to a female consort—these leaders flatly rejected all other cults practiced in Jerusalem or on "every hill" outside the capital. They particularly tried to wipe out once and for all female religious practices and goddesses of all sorts. Popular religion of the period persisted, however, and the polemics against female cults as well as archaeological evidence from Palestine and from the Jewish military establishments at Elephantine on the Nile River (fifth century B.C. papyri) prove beyond any doubt that Yahweh continued to be venerated in various forms, even in conjunction with a female consort. But the official leadership of the Jewish community in Jerusalem and in the diaspora kept agitating against female deviations from "pure" Yahwistic faith. Their suspicion that women were prone to lure men away from Yahweh towards other gods and goddesses (Deut 13:6; 17:2, 5; 1 Kings 11:2-8—Solomon's wives; 1 Kings 21—Jezebel; Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13—foreign wives) led to allegations that women nourished the inclination to evil more than men, that they upset the (male) world-order, that they were sexually hyperactive and promiscuous, and that they brought endless suffering upon poor, innocent, and seduced males (Genesis 3; 1 Kings 21; Zech 5:5-11; Ezekiel 16; etc.). Israel pictured as a vile prostitute (Hosea 1-3; Jeremiah 2-3; Ezekiel 16; 23) reflects this male prejudice; it grew up under the rule of theologians propagating the one-sided male character of Yahweh. In post-canonical and Christian writings the tendency



to mistrust women and devalue their experience increased ever more, exacerbated by the influence of some Greek traditions.

*Conclusion 4: Power, uncontrolled by the community as a whole—including women and marginalized groups—will, almost inevitably, corrupt those who wield it. Male dominance and the exclusion of women from church leadership and theology in Jewish and Christian tradition turned out to be one of the deadly sins committed by the followers of Yahweh and of Jesus Christ.*

#### V. OVERCOMING SEXUAL DICHOTOMIES IN THEOLOGY

The history of the interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures in regard to sexuality, gender roles, male dominance, and female submission or exclusion is a singular disaster. The female image only deteriorated through much of the apocryphal and early Christian writings.<sup>10</sup> The words of 1 Tim 2:13-14, although still relatively mild, set the tone: "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over man, she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." This line of reasoning (man is first, i.e., superior, not deceived, no transgressor) misreads Genesis 3, derogates females by putting them on a sinful and inferior plane, and thus qualifies fully as sexual discrimination. It makes women totally dependent upon men, depriving them of their human value. This will lead eventually in the course of church history to the question of whether or not women possess human qualities at all, whether or not they have an immortal soul and are capable of being saved by Christ. With this attitude of suspicion, the mainstream churches of Christian tradition have pushed women to the margin of their hierarchic structures, admitting them only as a sort of slave population created for the sole benefit of the male elite: they did the menial work for the male constituency (as in the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, referred to above). The parallel development of theological conceptions can easily be imagined. Ever more thoroughly, female characteristics and attributes were deleted from the concept of God, allowing only the confession of male attributes, titles, ways of action, or sentiments in regard to the Most High. While female theological discourse was kept alive in the side currents of mystical and heretical provenance, the powerful churches of mainline Christianity preached the male qualities of God, his authority, terrifying glory, almightiness, and, most of all, his punitive nature. Except for a very few designated "women teachers of the Church" (seven in the course of two millennia; e.g., Hildegard of Bingen and Theresa of Avila), the Roman Catholic Church has not officially accepted the contributions of female theologians. The cult of Mary was designed and controlled by men, and its central figure was cleansed of all sexuality. Protestant churches, for the most part, did even worse, at least up until the Second World War. They effectively reduced women to tools in the hands of male church leaders.

Centuries of tantalizing male influence on church and theology constitute a heavy burden for today's churches. Things must now be rethought and remod-

<sup>10</sup>Helen Schüngel-Straumann, *Die Frau am Anfang* (Freiburg: Herder, 1989).

eled. The years of abuse—by no means easily overcome—call for confessions of guilt on the part of males. The task is immense; the few decades since feminist interpretation opened our eyes to the gross distortions of male biblical interpretation have not been enough to resolve the problem. Alongside the many American women who pioneered a new reading of scripture stand many European women, their names less familiar in the United States, who have contributed substantial studies proving the ongoing male prejudice that has guided much of traditional exegesis.<sup>11</sup>

The theological deficiencies arising from one-sided male interpretation and preaching are enormous. As we have seen, male concerns are concentrated in outward affairs like politics, law, economics, the military, heroism, and power. “Inward” human values like emotion, sensitivity, empathy, and love—all considered more or less “unmanly” and relegated to the female nature—have been largely neglected. This history has produced the present polarization of the sexes, unmitigated by an overarching sense of unity. The devaluation and contempt of the feminine in official theological discourse has given rise to a fundamental split in the image of God. The absence of female theological experience has left disastrous holes in male theologies. Creation stories in the Bible itself already suppressed female imagery. Mother Earth collaborates only marginally with Yahweh in creation: “the earth brought forth vegetation” (Gen 1:12); “let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind” (Gen 1:24); “I (was) intricately woven in the depth of the earth” (Ps 139:15). All other affirmations about origins emphasize male (or is it female?) handicraft or fabrication by the spoken word alone. Creation theology is seriously impoverished by failing to employ the imagery that is, according to human experience, most directly related to new beginnings: pregnancy and birth.<sup>12</sup>

There may have been good reasons some time ago to limit theological notions of creation. It was perhaps essential that ancient Israelites draw boundaries over against foreign cults and mythologies. Indeed, we, too, must guard against the temptations and dangers of our own times and consequently redesign our understandings of God and creation on the basis of present circumstances. In that process, I see no present danger in using female metaphors for the events of creation. On the contrary, the prevalent use of male imagery is dangerous, because it suggests the disposableness and exploitability of our planet. Furthermore, present conditions demand the full participation of women in church and theology. Women and men must recover the fullness of theological insight. Female experi-

<sup>11</sup>See, for example: Marie-Theres Wacker, ed., *Der Gott der Männer und die Frauen* (Düsseldorf, 1987); Luise Schottroff, Silvia Schroer, Marie-Theres Wacker, *Feministische Exegese* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996); Silvia Schroer, *In Israel gab es Bilder* (Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1987); Irmtraud Fischer, *Die Erzeltern Israels: feministisch-theologische Studien zu Genesis 12-36* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994); I. Fischer, *Gottesstreiterinnen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1995); Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker, eds., *Von der Wurzel getragen: christlich-feministische Exegese im Auseinandersetzung mit Antijudaismus* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996).

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Sallie McFague, *Models of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

ence (and that of marginalized groups all over the world) must now be included. Excising what women and other oppressed groups have to say about God from their own life experience is tantamount to curtailing the image of the One who created humans in his/her likeness. It means diminishing and betraying God by stealing, ignoring, or obscuring parts of the divine identity.

The consequences of all this are obvious: We Christians, women and men, need desperately to find a place for all fields of human life and experience. All sorts of people, regardless of their ethnic or racial backgrounds, all layers of society, all professions and walks of life, all age groups, and most of all both sexes need to contribute their own knowledge and feelings to our understanding of the everlasting, life-giving, and life-saving action of God—Father, Mother, Child; Wisdom, Power, Glory; Truth, Love, Peace. In bridging the gaps between once polarized groups we come to celebrate the unity and inclusivity of God and of the liberator Jesus Christ. Inclusivity and openness are signs of true theological insight, while exclusivity and defensiveness signal only fear, weakness, and self-centeredness.

Paternal face and maternal mind? There is no dichotomy here, no splitting of the Divine Being. Rather, we are challenged to address ourselves to God the Mother (and totally so) as well as to God the Father (and totally so). Also, we call upon God the Liberator of poor and rich, the Reconciler of races and nations, the Protector of this wondrous world. There are no divisions in God; indeed, in God all our divisions are healed. ⊕