REVISITING GENDER-INCLUSIVE GOD-TALK: A NEW, WESLEYAN ARGUMENT

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Abstract

Though academic debate over gender-inclusive God-talk seems to have fizzled, the issue is a pressing one within many Christian denominations today—both within and outside the Church—and for that reason deserves to be briefly revisited. Accordingly, although in this essay we approach the issue as professional philosophers, our focus is on the life of the Church—more specifically, those no doubt sizable segments of the Church for which a personal God and Satan exist and evangelism matters. Running an elimination argument, we contend that *if* a certain sort of feminist concern about traditional God-talk is well-directed, the best response is to speak of not only God *but also Satan* in both masculine and feminine terms. And in closing, we address the possible worry that this response to the God-talk problem would not be Christian enough.

I

Our thesis is this: *If*, as it has been common enough to think, presenting God as exclusively masculine does injustice to women in the Church—injustice of a sort we will describe in the next section below—the best corrective is to speak of not only God *but also Satan* in both masculine and feminine terms.[1] Herein we shall simply *suppose* (or, *assume*) that presenting God as exclusively masculine is too objectionable and that Christians need a solution to the *problem* of how to speak about God. To make a case for our proposed response to the problem, we will

offer an elimination argument: we will try to show that none of the other possible responses is satisfactory compared to ours.

Of course, this project might seem oddly divorced from conversations about religion in the academy today. After all, relatively few feminist theologians or philosophers of religion, for example, are wedded to the notion of Satan, not to mention that plenty of them reject the view that there is a *transcendent* God.[2] And though from 1992 to 1998 five essays appeared in *Faith and Philosophy*, for example, on the question of whether God-talk should be gender-inclusive,[3] the debate seems now to have fizzled.

Yet there is good reason, we think, to briefly revisit the question at this point, since many Christian denominations continue to struggle with it—both within and outside the Church. (Consider, for example, that the 217th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.] recently voted on a proposal involving gender-inclusive language with which to refer to the Trinity.)[4] Their struggles are what have led us back to the issue, and we shape this essay accordingly. There *are* some significant points of contact between our argument and certain sentiments that feminist theologians have voiced over the years, as we will indicate with citations here and there particularly in the notes below.[5] And as it may already be obvious from our rather stiff form of presentation, we approach this issue as professional philosophers. But our focus herein is on the life of the Church—more specifically, those no doubt sizable segments of the Church for which a personal God and Satan exist and evangelism matters.[6]

Since the problem we will take up is largely a practical problem, our argument will also be heavily shaped by the demands of reaching a practical solution.[7] And we will operate on the view that concrete problems of everyday living are reason to rework certain theological beliefs and one's approach to ecclesial life. We realize that a view of that sort might not seem Christian enough, so we will underscore toward the end of this essay that, in fact, it reflects a substantial part of Christian thought, represented particularly well in the decidedly Wesleyan philosophy of a turn-of-the century American figure, Borden Parker Bowne.

II

Even issues involving pronoun usage, as trifling as they might seem at first, stem from far more than just fussiness over the precise shape that liturgy takes. And we should start by spelling out what often seems to be the concern about presenting God as exclusively masculine. Much of this surely is old hat; but it should be made explicit here.

The feminist worry might be expressed with the following argument:

(1)   The Bible refers to God with masculine pronouns.

So (2)   if I should adopt the linguistic practices that the Bible models (since the Bible is a true account of God and God's relationship with humanity), then I should refer to God with masculine pronouns.

And (3)   when I or also my fellow believers refer to God with masculine pronouns, I am very strongly prone to see God as masculine.[8]

Accordingly, (4)   when I or also my fellow believers refer to God with masculine pronouns, I am very strongly prone to see men as collectively more like God than women collectively are.

And accordingly, (5)   I am also very strongly prone to see men as better than women—particularly, of course, if I believe that God is the standard of goodness. (When the masculine is celebrated, the feminine is subjugated.[9])

Plus, as a result of all this, (6)   if I think that the human beings who lead the Church should be

the human beings who are most like God (who after all is the head of the Church)—or, in any case, if I think that the human beings who lead the Church should be the best human beings who *can* and *will* lead it—then I am strongly prone to think the human beings who lead the Church should be men.

And in addition to all this, (7)   the less I see God as like myself—or at least, the more I see God as far less like me than like other human beings—the harder it is for me to relate to God.

So (8)   if I am a woman and I see God as masculine, it is considerably harder for me to relate to God than it otherwise would be. Problems arise on many levels: psychological, social, ecclesial, and even soteriological.[10]

Herein we neither endorse nor reject this argument. The point is just that it seems to represent a common feminist concern.

III

Consider several possible ways in which one might try to solve the problem. One way is to simply speak of God in exclusively feminine terms,[11] reading scripture accordingly: "For God so loved the world that she gave her only begotten son." This might look inviting at first. But to make a point which is often overlooked and which is central to the argument in this essay: were we to treat God as a "she," there would still be the question of how to refer to Satan. We have four options:

[A] treat Satan as exclusively masculine
[B] treat Satan as exclusively feminine
[C] treat Satan as both masculine and feminine
[D] treat Satan as neither masculine nor feminine

The trouble is that if we took any of these options while talking as if God is exclusively feminine, we would stay stuck in essentialism. That is, to borrow some language from one scholar, we would talk in a way that conduces to the view that there is genuinely a pre-existent essence of *woman*—the view that women have "invariable and fixed properties," a set of shared, distinguishing features, which define what they are (Fuss 1989, xi–xii). To keep this essay a reasonable length, we will not *argue* here for the importance of avoiding essentialism. And we grant that although anti-essentialism now is the prevailing stance in feminist quarters and well beyond, there still is room for debate. Yet by now, opponents of essentialism have offered serious enough reasons to oppose it, opposition to it is sufficiently common, and the conversation about it has gone on long enough that we will take it for granted that its defenders have the burden of proof.

The essentialism debates, as they are sometimes called, took place among feminists and others during the 1980s and early 1990s. And part of the verdict that emerged at the end is that essentialism is false because, to quote the same scholar, "a complex system of cultural, social, psychical, and historical differences, and not a set of pre-existent human essences, position and constitute the subject" (Fuss 1989, xii). What is denied is not just that women's "whatness" is *biologically* determined. Rightly, we think, anti-essentialists indict any suggestion that there is some rigidly discrete category of, say, "woman" or "female" (or "African-American" or "homosexual"). And the concern is not just that the belief that there are categories of that sort is false. The concern is also that that belief is dangerous. For example, whenever people believe that there is a rigidly discrete category of "woman," they can end up with harmful views of women. And the following point is especially important: the idea is that the danger is no less real even when at first women are thought to be essentially *good* or *smart*, for example. Even if the essence of *woman* is at first presented as quite rosy, the view that there *is* such an essence can always end up hurting women. As an illustration, take, for example, the conception of the so-called Eternal Feminine in much of Romanticism. Although it was often intended to be a *flattering* portrayal—a testament to feminine innocence, purity, and even mystery—it nonetheless gave way to the sense that women had certain profound limitations: they were seen

as literally too good, too pure, to lower themselves into the messiness of existence. Notably, the conception of the Eternal Feminine did not arise primarily out of women's reflections on their own status: for the most part, it was a male projection of what the feminine is.

With that in mind, notice what would happen if we took any of the options mentioned above while presenting God as exclusively feminine. The trouble with taking option [A] or [C] is not just that it would be unfair to men. Now, as Christians the two of us think that how we treat men does matter—simply because we think it matters how *every*one is treated, regardless of whether the person is a member of an oppressed minority. And if we fret that we hold that view simply as a result of being privileged males, we are encouraged in thinking that certain feminist theologians have expressed sentiments similar to ours on this point. (As one of them puts it, "love is in the peculiar position of loving the tiger feeding its crying young as much as it loves the bereaved mother of a young gazelle. It must love the murderer as well as the victim and his family" (Farley 1990, 78).) Nonetheless, perhaps a more common feminist sentiment—understandably—is that since women rather than men are the oppressed group, the thing to do is to tend to men's welfare only after women have been fully liberated, at least. And both because we are philosophers and because we are Christians, we take seriously the possibility that that particular feminist sentiment is well-directed.

Even if it is, though, none of the options named above is satis-factory as a way to treat Satan while presenting God as exclusively feminine. In taking option [A], we would risk fostering the impression that women are all good and that evil is the province solely of men. Taking option [C] might well also give way to the sense that women are all good while men corner the market on evil. Neither would we help matters much if we went with [D]: doing so still might well encourage the view that women are all good and exclusively capable of goodness. And [B] would come with its own share of trouble. It would paint a picture in which every transcendent figurehead—every figurehead in the divine realm—is exclusively feminine: transcendence is the province solely of the splendorous feminine. Surely, that picture would be at least as dangerous as an image in which the feminine is all good and only the feminine is good.

The lesson is this: As an attempt to solve the problem we are concerned with here, the strategy of treating God as exclusively feminine is simply too problematic.

IV

Another possible response to the problem is to give up on referring to God with *any* pronouns and speak simply of "God" and "Godself." One snag, though, is that because of a long Christian history of encouraging the view that God is masculine, perhaps people are too prone to associate masculinity with the term 'God.'[12]

And we suspect that there would be a much deeper problem with eliminating all pronominal references to God. At best, it would make our talk about God pretty ungainly. It would be cumbersome enough to say: "For God so loved the world that God gave God's only begotten son," and it would sound even odder if instead of saying, for example, "God wants to draw you closer to himself," we exclaimed, "God wants to draw you closer to Godself." (Still worse might be the new rendition of Genesis 22.8: "Abraham answered, 'God Godself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.'"[13]) This awkwardness is no incidental thing, since our posture toward God is supposed to be reverential, and our testimony and witness need to be compelling. Talk of this sort would threaten to be a serious obstacle to reverence and compelling testimony.

Far more important, it would also come precariously close to presenting God as more of a principle, for example, than a *person*. Perhaps somewhere there are or will be human beings who can readily see personhood even where there is no gendered identity. But to put it simply, most human beings in most of the world today are not human beings of that sort. In fact, most of us today are simply not up the task of conceiving of a genderless person: as a *practical* matter, for us the task is on the order of trying to conceive of a square circle. (Even transgendered persons, as we see them, are gender*ed*, though neither as *exclusively* masculine nor as exclusively feminine.) As a result, an intimate relationship with a Divine Person who is supposed to be genderless is beyond our reach. For all intents and purposes, if for us there is no Divine Mother or Father, for example, but only an enigmatic "Godself," there is no Divine Person, and if there is no Divine Person,

there is no intimate relationship with God of the sort that Christians prize. So at least as long as evangelism matters, presenting God as genderless would be counterproductive, even for believers who already have an intimate relationship with a genderless God. We do think that speaking just of "God" and "Godself" is viable within conversation among professional *theologians* and *philosophers*, for example (since they have had a chance to cultivate the life of the mind enough to be particularly attuned to the need for gender-inclusive God-talk and to grow especially practiced at accommodating that need). But of course, not all conversation is conversation of that sort.

For that matter, all told, the difficulty involves far more than just the constraints of modern-day languages. As long as there are listeners who can conceive of persons only as gendered, talk of a *personal* God will give way to notions of a *gendered* God, even if talk of a personal God is devoid of gendered pronouns. And imagery, for example, used to describe the Divine will lead to one impression or another about what God's particular gender is—in other words, God will look masculine, feminine, or somewhere in between—even if we try to wipe gender out of the pictures we paint. (In cultures in which strength is typically associated with masculinity, for example, highlighting God's power will tend to have a predictable result.)[14] So the problem we are concerned with here would still be plenty troublesome even if, say, English, French, and German gave us strictly non-gendered pronouns with which to refer to persons (instead of 'he,' 'she,' '*il*,' '*elle*,' '*er*,' '*sie*,' and so on). And in any case, eliminating pronominal references to God would be insufficient as a remedy. It would still leave us with the question: How will we speak of God—in masculine terms, in feminine terms, or both?

V

We have discussed a couple of possible ways to try to solve the problem we have been considering, and in light of what we have said about their shortcomings the main advantages of *our* corrective should be easy enough to see. On the one hand, referring not only to God but also to Satan with both masculine and feminine pronouns would spare us from the consequences of treating God and Satan as exclusively masculine. And on the other hand, out of all known possible remedies

that would not get in the way of a personal relationship with God, our corrective comes the closest to measuring up to anti-essentialist standards insofar as it would be the least conducive to essentialist views of women.

Without question, the option we propose would leave certain problems unsolved. At the least, it would do nothing to directly challenge the view that to be masculine is to be rational, strong, and so forth, whereas to be feminine is to be emotional, seductive, and so on. But there are only so many problems one can solve here at one time, so if what we propose is the best possible corrective to the problem in focus here, that should be enough.

One might also worry that in using feminine, as well as masculine, pronouns to refer to God and Satan, we would stray too far from Christian doctrine. Yet our proposal is far less contentious on that front than it might at first seem. Surely, it is safe enough to say that gender and the language that denotes it is socially constructed *to such an extent* that none of that language can describe very accurately a trait that God or Satan has. *Sex*—as in "male" and "female"—is not socially constructed, of course. But to put it bluntly, since neither God nor Satan has a body, neither of them has male or female sexual organs. And since, in the final estimation, none of our personal pronouns can describe God or Satan very accurately, and if the feminist concern we have talked about is well-directed, we might as well opt for the pronouns that can solve the problem: this is one case is which a pragmatist sort of move is warranted.

Nonetheless, pragmatist moves can leave a believer nervous. (We, at least, are not prone to make them often.) So it is worth emphasizing that we are hardly on our own in taking an approach of this sort to the kind of practical problem we have been considering. Moreover, we should note that we are in particularly *good* company by Wesleyan standards, for example. This is not the place, of course, for a sweeping survey of Christian or Wesleyan thought. But to give some indication that our proposal is in line with a substantial part of both, we want to end this essay with a look at one particularly influential "child of the Wesleyan tradition," as he has been called (Langford 1983, 121)—Borden Parker Bowne (1847–1910). Bowne was a devout Methodist philosopher and preeminent leader in his church[15] who

taught at Boston University and founded the Boston Personalist tradition in philosophy and theology, a tradition which heavily emphasizes the importance of persons. (Central to Boston Personalism, for example, is the view that God is a person.)[16] For awhile, Bowne and his Boston Personalist tradition played a sizable role in American Christianity in general.[17]

There is a deeply practical bent in all of Bowne's work, and where Christianity is concerned he focuses most heavily on practice. It is very much in character that he says in one essay: "Our real faith is not the formula we repeat, but the principles by which we live. We may be practical atheists while professing faith in God, and veritable heathen while claiming to be Christians. And when the theological formula is correct, we may miss the spiritual truths" (Bowne 1910e, 184). In Bowne's view, far and away the highest priority that Christians should have as Christians is to live righteously. On one occasion (Bowne 1910d), he even calls righteousness "the essence of religion," and, returning to a theme that surfaces often in his writings,[18] he maintains that "whatever our theological faith, whatever our religious practices, and whatever our religious pedagogics, their sole use and value consist in helping us to lives of love and righteousness before God and man. This is that for which they exist and that which gives them meaning and justification" (Bowne 1910d, 75–6). Elsewhere he warns that "the Churches whose creeds are speculatively the most elaborate have never been the most efficient in turning from darkness to light" (Bowne 1981e, 177–8). And he thinks that if there is any value in mystical experiences, for example—meaning experiences in which one believes one has unmediated contact with the divine—their value is purely instrumental: the only purpose of direct contact with God is, or would be, moral improvement (see, e.g., Bowne 1910d, 86; 1899, 83). For Bowne, lofty metaphysical dreams, swelling passions, sentimentality, and even religious ecstasy must not get in the way of hard-nosed discipline and a rapt attention to ethical responsibility.[19] His emphasis on the importance of righteousness pervades even his soteriology (see, e.g., Bowne 1903, 74; 1899, 56–7, 59). And in one essay, he goes so far as to claim that in the event of a conflict between "faith and morals," as he puts it, "humanity can better dispense with

the former than with the latter" (Bowne 1981a, 174). In Bowne's Christianity, achieving ethical ends is by far the primary concern.[20]

We should add that what he advocates in the name of Christianity is not "mere ethics," to use his language again (e.g., Bowne 1910d, 85; 1903, 74). For example, he claims not only that righteousness is the essence of religion, but also that a certain sort of prayer is—namely, the sort which is "essentially the attempt to find God, to have communion with him, to relate our life with all its contents to the divine plan, and to subordinate our life to the divine will" (Bowne 1910c, 132–3). And though Bowne often says that "obedience is the only test of discipleship" (Bowne 1903, 74; cf. 1910b; 1910d, 79, 92; 1899, 84, 97; 1898a, *passim*), he is quick to stress that "the Lord looketh at the heart" (Bowne 1898a, 104–5; cf. 1981a, 175; 1910c, 144): for Bowne, true obedience surely involves more than just an outward display of following God's commandments. In a more philosophical mode, he also fuses a utilitarian stress on good consequences, on the one hand, with a deontological emphasis on willing what is right, on the other hand—claiming not only that how good or bad an action is depends on what its consequences are, but also that how good or bad *persons* are hinges on their motives (Bowne 1892, 34; see especially 1981c; and cf. Beauchamp 1997, 79). In the picture he paints, conscience tells us only what we should aim to achieve: in order to figure out how best to achieve it, we must use reason (see especially Bowne 1981c, 76, 78). When we fail to make an earnest effort to bring about what conscience calls for, we are guilty of wrongdoing; but when we choose an ineffective way of trying to bring it about, we simply make a mistake (see Bowne 1899, 41; 1892, 34).

Nonetheless, mistakes matter, in Bowne's view, because we need to make the world a better place. And he sees the life of righteousness as a life aimed at improving the world. He writes characteristically, for example: "Not formal moral correctness, but vital fullness, is the deepest aim in life" (Bowne 1981d, 83). That is, most of all we must seek "the development of the great social forms, the educational facilities, the gathered knowledge, the industrial activities, the wise cooperation and organization, and the stored wealth without which humanity cannot progress" (1981d, 82–3). Social justice also is a crucial part of what Bowne urges, and here it is worth noting that he was relatively

feminist for his day and age. Just for example, to quote a comment that appeared in the Boston *Evening Transcript* (6 April 1910) five days after his death, his satire was "never quite so sharp and hot as when he was dealing with the opponents of woman suffrage" (quoted in Steinkraus 1981, v, and attributed to Edwin T. Mead).[21]

In Bowne's estimation, at any rate, the humble prayer of a righteous man *needs* to avail much (cf., e.g., Bowne 1910e, 181; 1909, 329–30; 1899, 106; 1898b, 376, 382; 1892, vii, 36, 40, 76)—and the need is so great that even prayer (see especially Bowne 1910c, 131–2, 146) and even metaphysics should be, above all else, instruments geared to promote the righteous living that can bring about progress. Remarkably, Bowne claimed that it matters relatively little whether there is a correspondence—in the stricter senses of the term—between the conclusions that metaphysical speculation yields and what absolutely exists (see especially Bowne 1882, 12). For him, the value of metaphysics lay solely in its pragmatic functions.[22]

Of course, our claim is not that Bowne got all of this right. It suffices to say that his version of Wesleyanism holds a respectable place in Christian thought and that, like us, he operated on the view that concrete problems of everyday living are reason to rework certain theological beliefs and one's approach to ecclesial life. Nonetheless, that point is worth stressing here, in case we have seemed too willing to sacrifice the integrity of Christian doctrine in responding to the particular problem we have considered. That problem, again, calls for a practical solution. And in the end, making a relatively small change in our linguistic practices is worthwhile if it can enhance what Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1954) aptly called our life together.[23]

Notes

1. We use the term "feminine" only in the very broadest sense. We realize that terms of that sort may well be problematic in certain contexts, at least. (See, e.g., Daly 1978, 68, emphasis in the original: "[Femininity has] *essentially nothing to do with femaleness*." Cf., e.g., Greer 1970, 90.) Here and in similar cases below, we opt for the term "feminine" instead of "female," e.g., simply because "female" seems better suited for denoting sex than for denoting gender.

2. E.g., even alone Heyward's *definition* makes it easy to imagine that she rejects that view: "God is our power in mutual relation" (Heyward 1989, 188). Throughout this essay, all we mean by "feminism" is, to borrow Blackburn's aptly wide definition, "the approach to social life, philosophy, and ethics that commits itself to

correcting biases leading to the subordination of women or the disparagement of women's particular experience" (Blackburn 1996, 137).

3. See Dell'Olio 1998; Ishan 1996; Hook and Kimel 1995; Harper 1994; and Johnson 1992. Dell'Olio, Ishan, and Johnson endorse gender-inclusive God-talk, particularly God-talk which refers to God as "mother." In contrast, Hook and Kimel, along with Harper, think we should refer to God in exclusively masculine terms.

4. See, on the PCUSA website, http://www.pcusa.org/ga217/newsandphotos/ ga06086.htm, which includes a link to the paper ("The Trinity: God's Love Overflowing") that the Assembly voted to "receive and commend to the church for study": http://www.pcusa.org/theologyandworship/issues/trinityfinal.pdf.

5. At the least, comments such as the following in Pippin 1996, 314, are quite notable: "Some recent feminist readings question the . . . value of [representing] evil in a female body and character and the connection of evil with female sexuality." (Pippin 1996 includes some other relevant bibliographical information.) Insofar as we focus on the life of certain segments of the Church, the sorts of feminist concerns we concentrate on here are, e.g., more like Dorothee Sölle's than those of Mary Daly, who professes to have left Christianity (see, e.g., Sölle 1990, 74).

6. We also look just at those segments of the Church that use only languages such as English, French, and German in which there are gendered pronouns with which to refer to persons.

7. At times below, we also use certain religious language which, for its lack of clarity (i.e., precision, determinacy), we would avoid in other contexts.

8. Particularly worth considering here is Daly 1973, 17–8: "Sophisticated thinkers, of course, have never intellectually identified God with a Superfather in heaven. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that even when very abstract conceptualizations of God are formulated in the mind, images survive in the imagination in such a way that a person can function on two different and even apparently contradictory levels at the same time. Thus one can speak of God as spirit and at the same time imagine 'him' as belonging to the male sex." In a note here (201n.10), Daly quotes a remarkable line from McKenzie 1956, 93–4: "God is of course masculine, but not in the sense of sexual distinction." And Daly continues: "Such primitive images can profoundly affect conceptualizations which appear to be very refined and abstract." Cf., e.g., Inclusive-Language Lectionary Committee 1984.

9. See especially Daly 1973, 19: "If God is male, then the male is God. The divine patriarch castrates women as long as he is allowed to live on in the human imagination." And cf., e.g., Sölle 1990, 69–76; Ruether 1989, 151: "Male monotheism reinforces the social hierarchy of patriarchal rule through its religious system in a way that was not the case with the paired images of God and Goddess. God is modeled after the patriarchal ruling class and is seen as addressing this class of males directly, adopting them as his 'sons.' They are his representatives, the responsible partners of covenant with him. Women as wives now become symbolically repressed as the dependent servant class. Wives, along with children and servants, represent those ruled over and owned by the patriarchal class. They relate

to man as he relates to God. A symbolic hierarchy is set up: God-male-female. Women no longer stand in direct relation to God; they are connected to God secondarily, through the male. This hierarchical order is evident in the structure of patriarchal law in the Old Testament, in which only the male heads of families are addressed directly. Women, children, and servants are referred to indirectly through their duties and property relations to the patriarch [citing Bird 1974]. . . . Male monotheism becomes the vehicle of a psychocultural revolution of the male ruling class in its relationship to surrounding reality"; Schneiders 1989, 65: "The Bible was written in a patriarchal society by the people, mostly men, whom that system kept on top. It embodies the androcentric, that is, male-centered, presuppositions of that social world, and it legitimates the patriarchal, that is, male-dominant, social structures that held that world together. Its language is overwhelmingly male-oriented, both in reference to God and in reference to people. In short, the Bible is a book written by men in order to tell *their* story for *their* advantage. As such, it confronts both women and justice-inspired men with an enormous problem." Cf. also Nothwehr 1998, 93, which includes some other relevant bibliographical information.

10. Something of this point may underlie Ruether's (1983; 1981) question, "Can a male saviour save women?" e.g. Cf., e.g., Schneiders 1989, 66: "Language is that by which we construe and construct our world. To the extent that women are invisible in biblical language, they are nonparticipants in the biblical construction of reality."

11. One can take this sort of move even farther—as far as Gately 1993 (which is cited approvingly in a string of mainstream essays in feminist theology). But presumably Gately leaves us without a *personal* God. And for reasons discussed below, we need for God to be a person.

12. No doubt, the concern that they are has driven a lot of the "Goddess thealogy" developed by feminist theologians. There is some indication of this in Eller 1996, e.g., which includes some other relevant bibliographical information. "The*a*logy" is the chosen spelling, incidentally.

13. The NIV translation is the one modified here.

14. How masculine or feminine God looks to me in one image or another depends in large part upon how gender is conceived in my particular culture. Plus, presumably it also depends upon the traits *I, in particular*, associate with the men I have known versus the women I have known. So we should mention that in making the most effective use of the sort of God-talk we advocate—whether making the most effective use of it in a sermon or in one-on-one conversation, e.g.—perhaps one would tailor one's imagery to one's particular audience at least to some degree (mixing images in which God is most likely to look feminine *to that* audience, on the one hand, with images in which God is most likely to look masculine to that audience, on the other hand; in connection with all this, worth considering is Campbell and Burns 2004, e.g., on Wesleyanism within a multicultural society). Nonetheless, we suspect that alternating between masculine and feminine *pronouns* in referring to God could do the lion's share of the work against essentialism.

15. See, e.g., Hutchison 1971, 407, with n.1.

16. A clear account of what the term 'personalism' means for Boston Personalists is hard to come by—not surprisingly, since so is a clear definition of 'person' that measures up to their standards (cf., e.g., Lavely 2002, xix). For some relevant accounts of what 'personalism' means, see, e.g., Kohák 1997, especially 11: "Most fundamentally, personalism is a philosophy committed to the *primacy of person-al (subject-related) categories of value and meaning*, to the mutual respect of all beings in a *reality experienced as a community of persons* who are convinced that subject-related categories are subjectival, not subjective in the sense of being private and arbitrary"; Lavely 1991; Deats 1986, especially 2 (a revision of a line in Lavely 1967, 107): "Personalism is a philosophical perspective for which the person is the ontological ultimate and for which personality is the fundamental explanatory principle." Also worth considering is Bengtsson 2006, 31–4, 49–53, 54n.76, 61. And see especially Lavely 1991; Deats 1986, 2n.3 for some other relevant bibliographical information. For bibliographical details related to Bowne and to Boston Personalism in general, see first and foremost Gacka 1994, 25–86; Bowne 1981f, 198–215.

17. E.g., as late as 1936, Wieman and Meland (1936, 134) could still declare that Bowne's thinking "has probably reached the minds of more professing Christian people than any other philosophy of religion in the United States." Fosdick (1956) said that "reading Bowne saved his intellectual life" (Trotter 1986, 18). And Martin Luther King, Jr., who studied philosophy and theology at Boston University under two of Bowne's chief successors (Edgar Sheffield Brightman and Harold DeWolf), described Boston Personalism as a pivotal resource for his social thought and action: "It was mainly under these teachers that I studied personalistic philosophy—the theory that the clue to the meaning of ultimate reality is found in personality. This personal idealism remains today my basic philosophic position. Personalism's insistence that only personality—finite and infinite—is ultimately real strengthened me in two convictions: it gave me metaphysical grounding for the idea of a personal God, and it gave me a metaphysical basis for the dignity and worth of all human personality" (1958, 100). On Boston Personalism's connections with King's social thought and action, see Deats 1986, 7–8; Muelder 1986, 245–6, 247; 1977; Ansbro 1982; Smith and Zepp 1975; Lewis 1970, though note that Cone (1986; 1984) and Raboteau (1988) argue that decidedly "white" traditions such as Boston Personalism had far less influence on King than it has often been thought. No doubt, Bownean personalism was especially influential among Wesleyans in particular, which makes a lot of sense in light of how much it has in common with Wesleyanism. See, e.g., Oord 2002, 117–20.

18. Cf., e.g., Bowne 1910d, 81; 1981a, 175: "The end of the law is love. The purpose for which the whole machinery of religion exists is to elevate those natural sanctities which God has planted in the human heart into controlling and abiding principles. Not to make us partakers of an alien holiness, but to create within us a pure heart and a clean one is the aim of the Gospel"; 1981b, 175, where Bowne says that faith is meant "to supplement ['the moralities'], to aid their growth"; 1898a, 105; 1878. Consider also, e.g., the extent to which Eucken 1915, 25 and

Pyle 1910, e.g., 189, testify to how important a role this sort of view played in Bowne's thought.

19. He does not reject mysticism *wholesale*: he leaves open the possibility that human beings can directly encounter God (e.g., 1899, 82–3), thus distinguishing himself from Kant (1979, 63), e.g. Contrast also Bertocci (1951, 82–120), one of Bowne's main successors within Boston Personalism. Yet Bowne wants to test the value (and authenticity) of mystical experiences by judging whether they bring with them an "increase of moral and religious effectiveness" and thus "practical significance" (Bowne 1899, 83). Plus, he is far more prone than, say, his friend William James (1961, 21–38) to discount particular mystical experiences as "purely neurological or pathological ['disturbances']" (Bowne 1903, 75; see, e.g., Bowne 1899, 9–10, 61, 91, and especially 102–3). Further, at times Bowne qualifies his denouncements of emotionalism (e.g., 1899, 90; 1892, 44–5), e.g.—but only lightly and briskly. And his distrust of fervor (which, e.g., 1903, 74–5 evinces) goes hand in hand with his caution toward human sentiments (see, e.g., 1909, 329; 1892, viii, 44–5, 78). Granted, he sees authentic faith as a direct product of either sentiment or moral willing rather than logical inference (see, e.g., Bowne 1910e, 181; cf. especially Anderson 1990, 109–12, 114–6). Nonetheless, he maintains that the "religious ideal must always include the cognitive . . . ideal" as a "barrier against superstition" (Bowne 1981b, 164), and he also aims to guard against claims of spiritual authority on the basis of feeling or mystical experiences. To find a possible motivation behind all this, see, e.g., Bowne 1903, 74, and Bowne 1899, 31–2, with McConnell 1929, 211.

20. For discussion of a comparable feature of Wesley's own thought, see, e.g., Marquardt 1992.

21. See also, e.g., Bowne 1892, 241–3 on the "ludicrous inapplicability" of the biblical claims (Colossians 3.18; Ephesians 5.22–24; 1 Peter 3.1) that the husband should have authority over the wife. Though scripture does matter for Bowne, he thinks conscience, informed by reason (see Marshall 2002a; 2002b, 25–6), must be the final judge: it should be the standard by which to judge scripture, rather than scripture the standard by which to judge moral action (cf., e.g., Pyle 1910, 195). See, e.g., Bowne 1898a, 92: "In general, the progress in theology has consisted in adjusting *readings* to those fundamental principles of good sense and good morals to which revelation must conform, if it is to be of any value for us." Plus, cf. Bowne 1899, 34–5, with Isaiah 29.16 and 45.9. And on the atonement, see especially Bowne 1900, though also, e.g., Bowne 1899, 58, 75–7. See also Bowne 1981a, 174, on how, in Bowne's view, the Pauline letters and the Gospel of John, versus all the other parts of scripture, fare in relation to various human natures.

22. For the full evidence for this, see Marshall 2002a, 657–9; 2002b. One of Bowne's students represented him well in saying that "*need—spiritual need* [*sic*] is the mother of the personal and true God" (Pyle 1910, 196–7, emphasis in the original). And it is no wonder that Bowne thought the best metaphysical medicine was a compelling argument that there is a God who is a person. After all, on the one hand, he must have seen how difficult it can be to make sense of what prayer is

unless it is directed at a person. (Cf., e.g., the passage quoted in Oord 2002, 118, in which Brightman (1943, 62–3), Bowne's main protégé, points plainly enough to the difficulty.) On the other hand—e.g.—he agreed with a view he attributed to John Stuart Mill: "Goodness in God must be the same as goodness in man!" (1981c, 77). And it is easy enough to see why, particularly if, as Bowne wrote, "the fundamental aim is to reproduce Christ in the disciple" (1898a, 105)—i.e., especially if we are to seek righteousness by imitating the goodness of God.

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