Leslie G. Woods

Maternal Images of God
in Second and Third Isaiah

"A religion which seeks to convey the Teaching of God, who is above and beyond both sexes, cannot succeed in conveying that Teaching if it seeks to do so in a manner which implies that a positive-divine value is attached only to one of the two sexes."[1]

Feminist scholars are not the only people troubled by the predominantly male language describing God in the Hebrew Scriptures. Liturgists, nuns, pastors, and lay women alike seek to reconcile the Biblical images of God with their own experiences of the divine: God the Father and God the Mother.[2]

Motherhood of God

Recent years have seen a surge of literature concerning feminine and feminist themes in the Hebrew Scriptures, and the images that spark my interest are those of a feminine God. Indeed there are many, some of which describe God as mother.

The obvious starting points for this investigation are Second and Third Isaiah, because within that short corpus gynomorphic language abounds, concerning both Lady Zion and God Godself.

Women who are troubled by the overwhelming representation of God as male are not at a loss for a remedy; there is a gender-inclusive God within the Biblical texts. In fact, "one of the best-kept secrets of the Church is the fact that the Bible itself sometimes describes God in feminine terms."[3]

While language for God in the Biblical texts is predominantly masculine, feminine images of God do exist and are more common than many would believe. Indeed, several abstract descriptions of the God of the Hebrew Bible are grammatically and spiritually feminine. For example, Spirit and Light are both grammatically feminine images that are used specifically to refer to the Deity.[4] So also Lady Wisdom sometimes encompasses attributes of the Divine.[5]

The feminine God does not exist only in abstraction, however. Common in modern liturgies is the theme of God the parent, or more usually, father. Interestingly, God the parent is not as common in the Hebrew corpus as is suggested by modern liturgies.

1 Gruber Mayer I., *The Motherhood of God in Second Isaiah*. Révue Biblique 1983/4. 359.
2 Foster Julia A., *The Motherhood of God: The Use of Hyl as God-Language in the Hebrew Scriptures*. In Hopfe Lewis M. (ed.), *Uncovering Ancient Stones: Essays in Memory of H. Neil Richardson*. Winona Lake, 1994. 93–94.
3 Emswiler S. N., *The Ongoing Journey: Women and the Bible*. New York, 1977. 119.
4 Schüngel-Straumann Helen, *The Feminine Face of God*. In Häring Hermann – Metz Johann Baptist (eds.), *The Many Faces of the Divine*. London, 1995. 93–94.
5 Foster 95–97.

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In fact, God receives the appellation "father" eighteen times in the Hebrew canon, a surprisingly small number, considering the immensity of the corpus and the patriarchal structure of ancient society.

Knowing how rarely the Hebrew Bible refers to God as father, we turn to the idea of God as mother with little hope that such language exists. It is more difficult to count the number of times God is described maternally, particularly because the word "mother" is only once used to describe God (Isaiah 66,13).

That is not to say, however, that God does not do mother-like or womanly things or exhibit maternal behavior.[1] On the contrary, even some of the imagery referring to God as "father" describes behavior which characterizes the realm of ancient mothers.[2]

Thus, while a brief word search to produce the number of times God behaves as a mother is not possible, we do know that it is more frequent than we read in most Hebrew Bible translations, which tend to render feminine God language in the masculine.[3]

We find a surprising concentration of just such God language in the exilic and post-exilic Isaianic literature. In only 26 chapters, God is explicitly referred to as mother five times. In this study we will examine each passage, discussing how God's role as mother functions within its specific passage and how it plays into the rhetoric of Second and Third Isaiah.[4]

Finally, we will briefly describe the implications of a maternal God for the community of faith and for individual believers. The relevant passages concerning the motherhood of God are Isaiah 42,13–17; 45,9–11; 46,3–4; 49,14–18; and 66,12–14.

Like a Woman in Labor (Isaiah 42,13–17)[5]

13 YHWH like a mighty one will go forth, like a man of wars He will stir up zeal,
He will raise a shout, indeed He will roar,
against His enemies He will show Himself to be mighty.
14 "I have kept silent from of old, I will be silent, I will restrain myself;
Like a woman in labor I will groan, I will pant and I will gasp all together.
15 "I will lay waste mountains and hills, and all their vegetation I will dry up[6];
I will turn rivers into islands, and pools I will dry up.
16 "And I will lead the blind in a road which they do not know,
in paths they do not know I will guide them:

1 Gen. 3,21 (seamstress); Num. 11,12 (nursing mother); Deut. 32,18 (mother giving birth); Hos. 11 (nursing mother); Jer. 31,15–22 (birthing mother); Ps. 22,9 (midwife).

2 In Ps. 103,13, God the father is said to possess motherly compassion, from the root *rhm*, which in the nominative means 'womb.'

3 The King James Version, the New King James Version, the Jerusalem Bible, the Contemporary English version, and the Good News Bible. This list is compiled by surveying how the major translations of the Bible translate Deut. 32,18, "You were unmindful of the Rock that bore [or begot] you, you forgot the God Who gave you birth." The translations here listed all distort the meaning of the second half of the verse in order to avoid the depiction of God as a woman giving birth, the undeniable meaning of a verb that is frequently translated, "the God who fathered you."

4 This study is not meant to be a comprehensive review of scholarly literature on this topic, but rather it seeks to call a wider audience's attention to maternal language for God in the Hebrew Bible.

5 All the translations in this paper are my own unless otherwise indicated.

6 I would rather translate this verb "wither," expressing the death of the vegetation. To preserve continuity with the same verb in the following line, however, I translate it, "dry up," which harmonizes both instances of the verb's usage.

Before them, I will make the darkness into light and rough places into level ground;
These are the things; I have done them, and I have not abandoned them.
17 *"They have turned backward, they will be utterly ashamed:*
they who trust in a graven image,
They who say to a cast image, "you are our gods."

Of interest is verse 14, in which God describes Godself in the first person as a woman in labor. Unquestionably the image is referring to a woman suffering the pain, fear and joy of bringing forth new life.

After describing Godself using a feminine participle, God continues to describe the effects of labor: groaning, panting, and gasping. This image of God as a new mother expresses the pain that She is willing to suffer in order to bear creation.

Indeed, this passage expresses God's power over creation. God created it, through Her own toil, sweat, and laborious work, and God has the power to "lay waste mountains." But the passage does not end with an image of destruction, for God promises to take good care of "the blind," making the way of Her children easier.

Of the five texts in this study, this passage has triggered the most debate among scholars. Much of that debate concerns the form and how it relates to the verses surrounding it. Some scholars, including the editors of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, define the literary unit of this passage as verses 14 through 17.[1]

In this reading of the text, the image of God's inactivity, described by silence, followed by the ear-splitting shrieks of God experiencing labor pains, functions as "an announcement of imminent divine activity."[2]

Phyllis TRIBLE interprets this passage by explaining that out of this divine travail a new creation will come, which will follow the destruction of the old creation in verse 15.[3] For the scholars who read verse 14 as the introduction to the following verses, God as a woman in labor is an image of creative power and triumph.

Others, though, group verse 14 with the preceding verse to show parallelism between the warrior-god imagery in verse 13 and the woman-in-labor imagery in verse 14. They argue that the woman-in-labor imagery displays the power and might of an active God Who is also a warrior rushing into battle.

This use of labor language in the Hebrew Bible typically describes anguish, rather than the miracle of new life,[4] but it is clear, considering the parallelism with God as warrior, that this use of birth pangs does not intend to describe a God trembling with fear.[5]

Rather, this image is used to express the creative, or rather procreative, power of God, whether it is parallel to a warrior God who cries out when charging into battle, or

1 TRIBLE Phyllis, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Philadelphia, 1978. 64. Also, DARR Katheryn Pfisterer, *Like Warrior, like Woman: Destruction and Deliverance in Isaiah 42,10–17*. Catholic Biblical Quarterly 1987/4. 560–571. DARR takes a slightly different approach from TRIBLE in that she allows for both interpretive arguments by taking 10–17 as a unit, rather than breaking it somewhere in the middle as do many of her colleagues (DARR 562).
2 DARR, 563.
3 TRIBLE, 64.
4 DARR Katheryn Pfisterer, *Two Unifying Female Images in the Book of Isaiah*. In HOPFE 24.
5 VAN WIJK-BOS Johanna W. H., *Reimagining God: The Case for Scriptural Diversity*. Louisville, 1995. 51–55. Also GRUBER 351–359.

whether it introduces a power-over-creation motif. This verse emphasizes both God's creative and destructive power.

Another debate about this text regards the use of auditory language.[1] Verse 13 begins with the sounds of war: war cries, shouts, and perhaps a Shophar, which is implicit in the verb *rw'*. War cries followed by the intentional and disciplined silence of YHWH create stark contrast, which repeats when the silence gives way to the sounds of groaning like a woman in labor.

These contrasting sounds cause a surprise for the readers who do not hear what they expect to hear. Within each of these shifts we hear the "power and risk and energy" required for each of these situations: war shouts, silence, and childbirth.[2]

Indeed, while this image of God as a woman in labor is a surprise to the modern reader, as it probably is to the ancient hearer, it is an appropriate image that conveys not only the power and strength implicit in the Godhead, but also a paradox of vulnerability and strength as the mother of all shares in the "pain of creation."[3]

Woe to the One Who Says to a Woman: 'What Are You Bearing?'

(Isaiah 45,9–13)

9 Woe to the one who contends with his maker,
to the earthenware vessel [who contends with] the vessels of the Earth.[4]
Does clay say to its craftsman, "What are you making?"
or, "Your work is without hands in it"?[5]
10 Woe to the one who says to a father, "What are you begetting?"
or to a woman, "What are you bearing?"
11 Thus says YHWH, the Holy One of Israel Who formed it:
"Do you ask me of the things to come;
about my sons and the work of my hands, do you command me?
12 "I have made the Earth, and humanity I have created upon it.
I, my hands have stretched out the heavens and all their hosts I have commanded.
13 "I have aroused him in righteousness and all his ways I will make straight;
He will build my city and my exiles he will send forth;
Not for price and not for reward," says YHWH of Hosts.

This passage falls in a peculiar spot within the text of Second Isaiah. It follows a long prophetic pronouncement about God's anointed messiah, Cyrus. Some have argued that this series of woes and rhetorical questions responds to Israel's unrecorded protest that God should use a foreigner as the anointed one of Israel.[6]

1 van Wijk-Bos, *Reimagining God*. 51–54.
2 Ibid., 55.
3 Ibid.
4 The meaning of the Hebrew for verse 45,9ab is uncertain.
5 The meaning of the Hebrew for verse 45,9bb is also uncertain, but many translators, including the JPS, translate it, "Your work has no handles."
6 Hanson Paul D., *Isaiah 40–66: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville, 1995. 105–107; Wijk-Bos, *Reimagining God*. 55–58.

Paul HANSON argues that this diatribe against those who would question the Creator is a response to Israel questioning God's chosen method of deliverance for the nation. HANSON is right in that this prophecy must respond to some complaint from Israel, but the text does not allow us to know what that complaint is.

The argumentation in this passage is clear, regardless of the impetus. Through a series of rhetorical questions in which the creation questions the Maker, God is likened to a potter, a father, and a woman who gives birth.[1] The unstated, yet obvious answer to the posed questions is "no," it is not right that the creation should question the Creator.

Another argument concerning this passage asserts that it is in accord with the other texts in Second and Third Isaiah in which God is declared to be the God of all nations and all peoples.[2] The Israelites, however, "are critical of God's relation to other creatures," sparking this polemical diatribe.[3]

This argument is tenuous at best, because the reference to Cyrus in verse 13 does not require that the "children" include all nations. The beginning of chapter 45 describes Cyrus as a special messiah for the nation of Israel alone. Indeed, this text is about the relationship between a child nation and a parent God.

The woes and rhetorical questions are designed to display the authority of God as potter, father, and mother. The text also condemns those who would have the impertinence and audacity to question that authority in their God, whatever their complaint.

It is significant that God embodies the authority of a craftsman, a father, and a mother, because so often in other texts, the authority of the mother is ignored.[4] This text does not ignore the significance of the mother, but rather affirms it by showing that YHWH demands respect as mother as well as father.

You Have Been Sustained from My Womb (Isaiah 46,3–4)

> *3 Listen to me, house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel,*
> *who has been carried from my womb, who has been sustained from my womb.*
> *4 And until old age, I am he, and until gray hair I will bear a heavy load,*
> *I have done and I will carry, and I will bear a heavy load and I will deliver.*[5]

In this text, YHWH describes God's care for Israel's well-being as that of a mother's care for her baby.[6] God elaborates by using language of nurture, "until gray hair." Until the mother is no longer able, she will carry and care for her children, and so will YHWH.

Verse 4 uses language of bearing a heavy load or burden and delivering it, evoking

1 FOSTER (93–94.) addresses the problem that the parallelism between woman (not mother) and father seems awkward. She proposes as a possible explanation: using the word "mother would have called up an image too close to the mother-worship of the fertility cults." I concede this as a possibility, but I wonder if the odd parallelism is due to the fact that all adult women were mothers, and so the two terms were interchangeable and synonymous.

2 Isa. 56,1–8; 60,3.

3 WIJK-BOS 57.

4 GRUBER (351–353.) explains that biblical poetry employs what Wilfred G. E. WATSON calls *gender-matched synonymous parallelism*, a technique in which parallel items are juxtaposed in gendered pairs. He explains that most cases in which God is compared to a father fail to employ gender-matched parallelism (except Malachi 1,6). This Isaiah text, however, does use gender-matched parallelism.

5 This verb, *mlt*, appears here in the piel and means "to deliver" in the sense of saving a life; it also means to lay eggs. In the *hiphil*, this verb means "to give birth."

6 SWIDLER Leonard, *Biblical Affirmations of Woman*. Philadelphia, 1979. 33.

pregnancy.[1] From the very first stages of motherhood until old age has made childbearing impossible, this mother carries and sustains her child.

Susan Ackerman has suggested that verse 4, while still containing mothering imagery in the nursing of the infant, also implies the work of YHWH as midwife, who participates in the birthing process by protecting the lives of mother and infant.[2]

Of the five texts discussed in this study, only this one is not on the usual lists of feminine images for God in Second Isaiah. Indeed, Mayer I. Gruber published an article on *The Motherhood of God in Second Isaiah* and listed the other four passages that are discussed in this paper, but not this one.[3]

I include this passage because, when body parts are mentioned with no possessive modifier, and when only one figure in the text can be the possible owner of those body parts, those body parts almost always belong to the aforementioned figure.[4]

Therefore my translation of the end of verse 3 reads, "my womb," rather than "a womb," or even "the womb." In addition to this general rule, this text does contain a first person common singular possessive suffix, and while it is not attached to the nouns for womb, *rhm* and *btn*, it is joined to those nouns with a *maqqeph*, and thus cannot be separated from the noun.

In this text, God is referring to God's Own womb, and the care of God's children begins on the day of birth. This is significant, because the language supports this translation and because this interpretation of the text harmonizes with the other maternal images for God within Second Isaiah.

Can a Woman Forget Her Nursing Infant? (Isaiah 49,14–18)

14 And Zion said "YHWH has abandoned me," and "my Lord has forgotten me."
15 Can a woman forget her nursing infant,
not having compassion[5] for the son of her womb?
Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.
16 Thus, upon my palms I have engraved you, your walls are before me continually.
17 Your sons made haste, those who tore you down,
and those laid you waste will go forth from you.
18 Lift up your eyes all around and see,
all of them have been gathered, they have come to you,
as I am living, an oracle of YHWH, for all of them are like ornaments
you shall wear, and you shall bind them as a bride.

This passage is another series of argumentative rhetorical questions in which God is defending Godself against the charge of abandonment. In this case, Zion complains that YHWH has abandoned and forgotten her.

God responds with a rhetorical question whose obvious and unstated answer is "no,"

1 Johnston Ann, *A Prophetic Vision of an Alternative Community: A Reading of Isa. 40–55*. In Hoppe. 38.
2 Ackerman Susan, *Isaiah*. In Newsom Carol A. – Ringe Sharon H. (eds.), *Woman's Bible Commentary*. Louisville, 1998. 176.
3 Gruber, 351.
4 Good examples of this are in Isa. 49,16: "upon *my* palms"; and Isa. 66,12: "upon *my* side."
5 The Hebrew word here translated "not having compassion," is from the root *rhm*, which means womb. God is frequently described as having *rhm* and, as Phyllis Trible has argued, this kind of compassion is decidedly maternal. It should be recognized that this feminine characteristic is frequently attributed to God. Trible, 31–40.

women do not forget their children. The particularity of a mother's care is emphasized, for the ancient mother provided care for all children until they were old enough to participate in the gendered tasks of adulthood, such as shepherding or cooking.

Children around the age of five or six began helping with menial tasks within the mother's sphere of daily chores, and by the age of thirteen they joined the adult labor force in which they worked primarily in same-gender groups.[1] Therefore all children, including boys, maintained a close relationship with their mothers until puberty,[2] whereas their relationship with their fathers was more distant.

When Second Isaiah compares God's care of Zion to that of a mother who is still nursing her children, we understand it as a powerful metaphor expressing YHWH's continual love and care for Her child.

In verse 15 and following, the speaker's continual use of the second person feminine singular pronoun, you, brings the mother and daughter into even closer relationship: this is a direct address of promise for a particular child, Zion.

A mother is expressing love for this one child whom she addresses intimately.[3] But even then, our Isaianic poet recognizes that not all human women are good mothers, and that, though unlikely, conceivably one may forget her suckling child.

Avoiding attributing this possible negative to YHWH, the word of God continues, "even these may forget, but I will not forget you." The motherhood of God is perfect, because it is not subject to the shortcomings and failings of humanity.

In this passage, Second Isaiah's personification of Zion as a woman is also noteworthy. According to Mark E. BIDDLE, Zion is frequently personified using feminine language, and the kind of woman she becomes is diverse. She is pictured as a mother, a daughter, a virgin, a bride, a menstruating woman, a harlot, an adulteress, a widow, and a royal figure.[4]

John J. SCHMITT argues that Second Isaiah draws the images of God as mother from the images of Zion as mother. SCHMITT also argues that this personification of Zion as a woman is easily transferable to the Godhead, because the feminine language is already established with reference to the city of Jerusalem.[5]

Whether or not Isaiah draws on Zion as mother as his source for God as mother, God's motherhood is clearly a different kind of motherhood than that of Zion. God is the unfailing mother Who does not forget Her child, even when all other mothers forget. YHWH is the quintessential mother.

As a Man Whose Mother Comforts Him, so Shall I Comfort You (Isaiah 66,12–14)

12 For, thus says YHWH:
"Here I am, stretching out to her like a river of well-being,
And like an overflowing stream, like a wealth of nations.

1 MEYERS Carol, *The Family in Early Israel*. In PERDUE Leo G. (ed.), *Families in Ancient Israel*. Louisville, 1997. 25–27.
2 See the Rebekah and Jacob stories in Gen 25 and 27.
3 VAN WIJK-BOS, 61–62.
4 BIDDLE Mark E., *The Figure of Lady Jerusalem: Identification, Deification and Personification of Cities in the Ancient Near East*. In YOUNGER K. L. et al. (eds.), *The Biblical Canon in Comparative Perspective*. Lewiston, 1991. 173.
5 SCHMITT John J., *The Motherhood of God and Zion as Mother*. Révue Biblique 1985/4. 569.

And you shall suck upon my[1] side and you will be carried,
and upon my knees you will be dandled.
13 "As a man whose mother comforts him, so I will comfort you,
and in Jerusalem you will be comforted.
14 "And you will see and rejoice in your heart,
and your bones will grow up like grass,
And the hand of YHWH will be known by his servant
and his indignation by his enemies."

This passage contains two mothering images, both of which involve a mother comforting a distressed child. YHWH promises to nurse and carry Her child on Her side. What a comforting, yet alarming feeling it is to have a creature so thoroughly dependant upon its mother for life, for safety, and for sustenance.

And yet, this is not daunting to YHWH. YHWH will dandle, bounce, and play with Her little child on Her knees. YHWH will strap Her child to Her side using a piece of cloth or a basket so that the little one will be constantly with Her throughout the day, to be cared for in the midst of Her work.

In the next verse the child is grown, and "as a man whose mother comforts him," so shall God comfort Israel. Even as an adult this person depends on his mother for comfort and cheer, and God does not abandon Her child when he reaches the age of adulthood, but rather continues to provide the same loving care that God gave the child in his youth.

By concluding the scroll of Isaiah with this image of God as the mother of an adult child, we learn that, in the end, Israel's relationship to God is not that of a dependant infant, though sometimes the nation of Israel behaves that way; but rather it is a mature relationship between two adults who are each accountable to the other.

Why Here? Why Now?

These maternal images of God are very important for the rhetoric of Second and Third Isaiah. In Second Isaiah, we find a prophetic voice who is trying to give comfort to a distressed people, reassuring them that God has not abandoned them. To that end, the language is uniformly optimistic.

In Third Isaiah, the outlook is more grim. The exiles have returned home to Jerusalem, but rather than experiencing the positive restoration that Second Isaiah promises, they suffer hardship: famine, poverty and community discord.

The new prophetic voice must address the difficulties of the disappointed community. In the midst of both of these situations, each with different prophetic needs, gynomorphic language for God is widely used.

Gruber suggests that the use of feminine language for God is an effort to include disillusioned and disenfranchised women more fully in the cult. The use of maternal language attempts to reconcile the cult with a population of worshippers who have left the religion of Israel:

1 Most people translate this verse, "carried upon *her* hip and bounced upon *her* knees," meaning Zion's hip and knees, but there is no suffix in the text to tell us about whose hip and knees we are talking. I have translated it with a first person possessive because, as I have argued above, the owner of unattributed body parts tends to be the most obvious person in the passage, unless otherwise specified. It therefore makes the most sense to translate the body parts as belonging to the speaker.

"Because of the insensitivity of his predecessors such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel who had intimated that, in the religion of Israel, maleness is a positive value with which divinity chooses to identify itself while femaleness is a negative value with which divinity refuses to identify itself."[1]

It is highly unlikely, however, that Second Isaiah, who utters some of the harshest words against idolatry in the Hebrew Bible, would be interested in making compromises. Further, SCHMITT argues that if this is the case, Second Isaiah has to have adapted this language from another cult. The adaptation and implicit acceptance of another cult are almost out of the question within the rhetoric of Second Isaiah.[2]

As GRUBER's explanation is not satisfactory, there must be some other explanation for this prophetic willingness to stray from traditional androcentric language for God. Susan ACKERMAN cites Leah BRONNER: "The loss of monarchy, Temple, and homeland led the sixth-century Isaianic authors to seek metaphors in the only social unit that still functioned, the family."[3]

Thus, she argues that the positive feminine language for God has, at its roots, the need for stability, and the only place to find that stability is in the home. She explains that, during times of crisis and social turmoil, those who do not have power in the normal patriarchal structure rise in importance and power to fill the vacuum that is either creating or created by the crisis.

The positive feminine and maternal language for God, therefore, may have been a result of a temporary rise in the status of women. Alas, she finally notes that with the restoration of social order, a government, and the cult, the misogyny of the previous period returned,[4] which is why Second and Third Isaiah are so unusual in their positive treatment of women.

I agree with ACKERMAN that a social impetus for the positive treatment of the female within these texts must exist, but I am unsure about her explanation. Her argument based on the stability of the home is compelling, but I doubt the Vth century BCE saw an improvement in the status of women.

On the contrary, the treatment of women in Ezra 10 and Nehemiah 10 indicates that women are degraded; Ezra's command of universal divorce and abandonment of the foreign wives cannot, in any light, be seen as a positive development.

Rather, while we cannot know what leads the authors of Second and Third Isaiah to employ maternal language for God, it may not have been the movements of great armies or the turmoil of whole communities that stimulated it.

Perhaps our prophets had especially good relationships with their own mothers or wives. Perhaps one of the writers who worked on these texts was a woman. Perhaps the role of God as mother was not so inconceivable for a people whose culture was structured around the family unit.

1 GRUBER, 358.
2 SCHMITT 557–559.
3 ACKERMAN 176.
4 Ibid. 176–177.

The Quintessential Mother

We have learned that God is not only father, but also mother. God bears children, nurses them, cares for and cradles them, plays with them, and finally allows them to grow, continuing to be ever-present. God is a comforting, loving mother Who watches over God's son Israel and daughter Zion.

God is willing to suffer for and with them, as She painfully brings life into a world that God created in the beginning. God has the strength to bear and to survive childbirth, and God will not abandon God's children when they reach adulthood.

God will grow old in watching over them and God will not fail to give them aid and comfort when it is needed. In the end, what we learn from these texts is that while God does fatherly things, God also does motherly things, and most importantly, God does Godly things. This God transcends the human constraints of gender normatives and is for all of creation a mother and a father.

These images of God as mother show that God does not limit Godself to the role of father, husband, warrior, or shepherd. Rather, God encompasses all possibilities of human experience. Because we come to know God only through our own experiences, we each know the God Who is particular to us.

God is mother and father, but God is also Lover and Friend, Caregiver and Judge. By reading these texts as they are written, using feminine language for God, we find Biblical evidence to validate many people's experiences of God, thus working to heal centuries of hurt caused by gender-exclusive institutions, language and translations.

The images of God as mother in Second and Third Isaiah, though they have always been there, have not always been read and heard. By proclaiming to the community of faith that there are Biblical references to God's femininity, we not only bring to light one of the Church's "best-kept secrets," but we also begin to understand that God is entirely beyond our comprehension and is most certainly beyond our gendered expectations.

Suggested Reading

Biddle Mark E., *The Figure of Lady Jerusalem: Identification, Deification and Personification of Cities in the Ancient Near East*. In Younger K. L. et al. (eds.), *The Biblical Canon in Comparative Perspective*. Lewiston, 1991.

Darr Katheryn Pfisterer, *Like Warrior, like Woman: Destruction and Deliverance in Isaiah 42,10–17*. Catholic Biblical Quarterly 1987/4.

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Swidler Leonard, *Biblical Affirmations of Woman*. Philadelphia, 1979.

Tribble Phyllis, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Philadelphia, 1978.

Wijk-Bos Johanna W. H. van, *Reimagining God: The Case for Scriptural Diversity*. Louisville, 1995.

Leslie G. Woods: Images Maternelles de Dieu dans le Second et le Troisième Chapitre d'Esaïe

Durant de nombreuses années, les femmes et les hommes de foi ont lutté avec des images de Dieu exclusivement dominées par le langage masculin. Il y a, cependant, des documents dans le corpus hébraïques à partir desquels débute une discussion sur les caractéristiques féminin de Dieu. Cinq passages du second et troisième chapitre d'Esaie qui emploient un langage 'maternel' pour décrire Dieu, sont intéressant dans le cadre de cette étude. Ces passages ne sont pas bien connus des croyants modernes par ce que, fréquemment, il ont été mal traduit dans les Bibles, utilisant le langage masculin à la place des concepts féminins. Quand ils sont bien traduits et discutés ouvertement, nous découvrons que Dieu est aussi bien mère que père, mais plus important, Dieu est un Dieu qui transcende le genre et contrecarre la construction étroite de l'ambition humaine.

Leslie G. Woods: Las Imágenes Maternales de Dios en Isaías Segundo y Tercero

Por muchos años, mujeres y hombres de fe han luchado con las imágenes de Dios que dominan casi exclusivamente el idioma masculino. Hay, sin embargo, hay amplio material en el cuerpo hebreo de donde empezar una discusión sobre las características femeninas de Dios. De interés en este estudio son cinco pasajes en Isaías Segundo y Tercero que emplean el idioma maternal para describir Dios. Estos pasajes no se conocen bien entre los creyentes modernos porque, frecuentemente, han sido mal traducidos en las biblias, al usar el idioma masculino en el lugar de conceptos femeninos. Cuando se traduce adecuadamente y se discute abiertamente, sin embargo, descubrimos que Dios es madre así como padre, pero, más importante, Dios es un Dios que transciende género y lamina la construcción limitada de la expectativa humana.