

BOOK REVIEW:

IS IT OKAY TO CALL GOD MOTHER?

Reviewed by Mary Seltzer

Is It Okay To Call God "Mother": Considering the Feminine Face of God, by Paul R Smith. Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 1993, 278 pp. List price \$12.95, **CBE introductory price \$10.25.**)

When I first saw the title, *Is It Okay to Call God Mother*, my mind raced ahead. Is this book promoting heresy? Is it theologically liberal, radically feminist, or new age? Yet, I was intrigued and decided to read the book. And, what a book it is! It is a must read for evangelicals! *Is It Okay to Call God Mother* provides rich biblical material on the feminine attributes of God which has been largely overlooked by the evangelical community.

- ❖ Does this book dismantle the Trinity? No. It firmly upholds the Trinity as central to orthodox Christianity.
- ❖ Does this book add Mother to the Trinity? No. *Is It Okay to Call God Mother* places the Bible as our first guide to faith and practice, over and against culture.
- ❖ Does this book advocate a goddess religion? No. Smith suggests that a female goddess religion is as unorthodox as a male-centered deity. The Christian God is not gender-bound.
- ❖ Does this book say Christians should call God Mother instead of Father? No. This book reminds Christians that there is a breadth of biblical images for God, even feminine ones. Therefore it is biblical for Christians to use feminine images both in understanding the nature of God and in reference to God.

Paul R. Smith, a Southern Baptist pastor for over thirty years, points out that the Southern Baptist Resolution of 1992 clearly overlooked the limits of language. He notes that the Resolution's constant capitalization of masculine pronouns places an emphasis on the masculine that is not present in the Bible. Intellectually we know God is beyond

gender; however, using only masculine pronouns sends image-shaping messages to our hearts and minds that are incorrect. By neglecting the feminine imagery for God, we have distorted our understanding of God.



On the other extreme, entirely avoiding masculine pronouns for God has a decided disadvantage, claims Smith. Such an approach abandons the rich Abba relationship, which is foundational to our Christian faith. It is not possible to have a personal God, who is neither male nor female. Our language is limited, and has no other way of communicating the personal, except through gender-based language. Being held in the arms of an "amorphous glob of indeterminate gender just doesn't hold much zip for most of us." Calling God Mother opens up a whole new view and image of God, without destroying the male image.

Every chapter of *Is It Okay to Call God Mother* makes an important contribution to the complex discussion of language and images of God. One chapter addresses the question, "But Jesus called God Father, not Mother"; another chapter shows the numerous instances where the feminine side of God is shown in scripture. Back in 1982, Amy Grant made God's name, El Shaddai, well known. Some scholars believe the meaning of El Shaddai is "God with many breasts." In the Genesis references we see intermingling of womb, breast, fertility, and the name Shaddai.

Each chapter of this book works at breaking through the boxes into which we have tried to cram God. Studying this book with your Bible will certainly expand your image of God.