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Veiled Glory: How Conservative Anabaptist Women Reflect the Feminine Image and Glory of God

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

VEILED GLORY: HOW
CONSERVATIVE ANABAPTIST WOMEN
REFLECT THE FEMININE IMAGE AND GLORY OF GOD

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by
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for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation.

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To Frieda – who provides retreat, nurture, and friendship
To Leah and Donna – who inspire me
To all the women at Life Counseling Ministries from whom I have learned

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ABSTRACT

Through the lens of the metaphor “Veiled Glory,” this dissertation explores how a traditional conservative Anabaptist view of the feminine reflects specific aspects of God’s image and glory. Drawing from Scriptures that detail feminine aspects of God’s image, such as mother, mystery, wisdom, and a Jewish rabbinic and mystical understanding of the Shekinah glory of God, one discovers significant feminine images of God threaded throughout the biblical account. Embracing these aspects of God’s image can bring personal identity and *shalom*, a Hebrew word describing a deep inner peace and sense of wellbeing, to women belonging to traditional Anabaptist communities.

Section I explores the conundrum women in traditional Anabaptist communities experience when caught between an often-silencing patriarchal leadership and the influence of contemporary views of the feminine sometimes experienced as minimizing to traditional feminine roles. Section II explores alternative solutions offered to address issues surrounding the traditional feminine, while noting the absence of identifying how the traditional feminine reflects elements of God’s image. Section III traces the feminine images of God as mother, Lady Wisdom, the feminine personification of wisdom as counterpart to the Creator, and the feminine aspects of the Shekinah, all of these images enhancing the traditional conservative Anabaptist view of the feminine. Character sketches of six women from the Scriptures help to shape the working metaphor of “veiled glory,” bringing vision and substance to the personal identity and agency of women living in conservative Anabaptist communities. It is through the disciplines of Scripture, meditation, prayer, and self-examination that conservative Anabaptist women become

enlivened by the Holy Spirit to receive and embody these important and often missed elements of God's image and glory. Sections IV and V outline the Artifact specifications of a non-fiction book that reveals the powerful metaphor of "Veiled Glory" as a meaningful way for women in traditional settings to embrace the feminine image and glory of God which they bear through personal spiritual formation. The Artifact itself is a non-fiction, somewhat academic, book manuscript described in Sections IV and V.

SECTION I: THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Vignette #1

Emily, a young mother of three small children, dreamed of being a wife and mother as a young child. She experienced the affirmation of her conservative Anabaptist community as she gratefully married her high school sweetheart and settled into the life of her dreams. While she has a strong relationship with her husband, his work involves long hours and a distant commute with a construction crew. He often comes home from work late in the evening, feeling exhausted. He seems distant and detached in the evenings. After eating supper, reading the newspaper, napping on the recliner, and playing a few minutes with the children, her husband is ready for bed. The days become an endless cycle of routine with the demands of three small children.

Emily's single friends, who are career women, recently left on one of their frequent vacations to an exotic, far-off place. It has been a long time since Emily and her little family has been on a vacation, or even take a day off. Emily finds her life's dream of becoming a wife and mother has now become an ironic trap.

Vignette #2

Anna has been a conservative Anabaptist pastor's wife for thirty-five years. Since her husband's ordination two years after their marriage, life has been a constant frenzy of activity. Their five children are all married and three new grandbabies will be arriving to join the current six that Anna enjoys grand mothering. In addition, her parents and her in-laws are all requiring more assistance with increasing health needs. Anna's time and energy do not seem to match the challenge of the growing demands.

However, there is an underlying and pervasive sense of uneasiness for Anna. Maybe it has been there a long time, deep under the surface, smothered by life's activities. Since her husband's ministerial retirement, the feelings of uncertainty have intensified for Anna. Of course, she could never tell anyone; they have had such an effective ministry. How could she rock the boat with her sadness? Anna feels she must gain victory over these sad, sinful feelings that she finds difficult to shake.

Anna has felt estranged and isolated from her husband more acutely in the last few months since the congregation where her husband had pastored for many years is facing significant relational issues. Men in the leadership of the church sharply disagree on the acceptability of the use of the internet for private family business.

Anna's husband has become distant and angry. She longs for conversation with him about the issues, but he refuses to talk, telling her it's not an issue she needs to think about. He has been gone many evenings for long "brothers'" meetings. When he is home, he is silent and withdrawn. It appears as if there will be a church split because of the divisiveness of the issue.

Anna's closest friend, Mary, is married to one of the other men who is most deeply resistive to the changes being proposed. Mary has been the one who has walked with Anna through the tough times for many years. Church division could mean losing her closest friend. The stress that everyone is experiencing in this issue seems unbearable. The tension at church is palpable.

Questions surface for Anna at unexpected times. Does her life really have meaning and significance? Anna has always tried to 'do the right thing,' managing her household and listening to the heartaches of women in their congregation. She has even

gathered small groups of struggling women together for tea, to share their joys and sorrows with each other. Anna thought her relationship with God was alive and vibrant, but lately that closeness seems blunted. She has been experiencing her relationship with God as insignificant and distant. Anna ponders what is missing and what will help her climb out of this deepening valley of despair.

Vignette #3

Barbara, an eighteen-year-old single woman, lives at home with her parents and is a member of a conservative Anabaptist church community. Her home has been emotionally chaotic since she was a tiny child. During her growing-up years, her father, a farmer, was emotionally distant from the family, often exhibiting unexpected outbursts of violent anger. Several years ago, he was severely injured in a farm accident. Her mother has worked hard to maintain the family dairy business during her husband's prolonged convalescence. Barbara, as the third child, first daughter, in the family, has been required to operate the morning and evening dairy operation with her two younger sisters and her uncle, her father's younger brother. Barbara's older brothers are working at jobs away from home to help support the family. Mom is overwhelmed in the house with a toddler and an infant while caring for her husband's medical needs.

Barbara has recently revealed to a counselor that she struggles with depression and some suicidal thoughts that "I would never act upon because I know it's wrong." She feels trapped at home with the increased responsibilities she has been required to shoulder since her father's accident.

Cautiously, Barbara discloses another piece of her story to the counselor. She reveals that her oldest brother has made numerous sexual advances toward her over the

past several years. He catches her in unexpected places in spite of her attempts to avoid him. She feels powerless to stop him. She has also discovered pornography in his room when she has done the weekly housecleaning.

Barbara refuses to confront her brother or to tell her parents about what is happening to her. She believes her mother already carries too much of a burden. If she confided in her mother, she would probably trivialize her revelation, or even possibly blame Barbara for what is happening. Barbara believes the church community thinks of her family as a difficult problem. She does not want to create more shame for her family.

The Dilemma for Women Living in Traditional Anabaptist Communities

Our three fictional stories each represent frequent issues that face conservative Anabaptist women. Each woman in the stories, although in different seasons of life with differing relational issues, struggles with an underlying inner sense of feeling trapped in her life situation. The community of believers that is called to affirm, cherish, and provide a context for healing relationships often remains oblivious to their difficulties.

Women who live in communities that embrace traditional Anabaptist values face significant issues on two opposing sides. Distortion of the Biblical understanding of men as leaders can leave women minimized with a diminished sense of their personhood. On the opposing side, the influence of popular feminist voices, which seek to validate a woman's personhood through nontraditional roles, increases the confusion for women living in traditional communities. As researcher of historic issues of Anabaptist women Joyce Irwin notes, "Societal influence makes itself felt even among religious groups

which are fundamentally at odds with society.”¹ A closer look at these opposing ‘voices’ vying for women’s hearts in traditional communities will help define the problem addressed by this dissertation.

A strong emphasis on male leadership, endorsed by Scripture, provides the basis for men assuming the leadership roles in the family, church, and community in a conservative Anabaptist setting.² A distortion of the biblical call for male leadership can deteriorate biblical male leadership into male dominance. Dominance imposes the masculine will and power without a sense of needing to hear or consider the feminine voice.

A strong emphasis on male leadership prevails within the traditional conservative Anabaptist communities. There are significant passages of Scripture, particularly in the New Testament epistles, that give credence to this emphasis. One primary passage bearing this theme is found in Ephesians five. The apostle Paul writes: “For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church.”³ Paul further instructs wives to “be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”⁴ At first glance, this straightforward instruction leaves little room for discussion. However, one little qualifying phrase in Paul’s instruction adds a new dimension to the discussion of husband/wife relationships and, I believe, to gender relationships in the Christian

¹Joyce L. Irwin, *Womanhood in Radical Protestantism, 1525-1675* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1979), xxvi.

² Daniel Kauffman, *Doctrines of the Bible, a Brief Discussion of the Teachings of God's Word* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Pub. House, 1928), 157, 412. This book could be considered a sort of theology 101, offering a conservative Mennonite doctrinal statement.

³ Ephesians 5:23.

⁴ Ephesians 5:22.

community. “As Christ also is the head of the church”⁵ requires a careful look at Jesus’ relationship to believers, more specifically to women. Christ, our example of servant leadership, becomes the foundational premise on which patriarchal leadership rests. Servant leadership, when defined as commitment to the well-being of another person regardless of personal cost, reshapes the parameters of patriarchal leadership. Instead of dominance and dictatorship, leadership becomes self-sacrificing servanthood.

Male dominance that spawns from a strong emphasis on male leadership can minimize the personhood of women in conservative Anabaptist communities. When men understand their leadership role as dictating law and order, leadership becomes suppressing. If one subscribes to the belief that women bring a critical element of the image of God to bear in our world, male dominance is at risk of squelching and minimizing a critical element of the Creator’s image and intention for the world. Consequently, in the case of male dominance, the feminine voice is neither pursued nor heard. When submission of women is emphasized without the accompanying call for the servant leadership of men, coupled with the dominance of patriarchal male leadership, it can lead to a disastrous impact for both women and men living in conservative Anabaptist communities. The minimizing of a woman’s sense of personhood, identity, and impact can lead to a chronic sense of emptiness and despair.

In the second, opening vignette, Anna, although a pastor’s wife, experiences this sense of emptiness, despair, and detachment from her husband. There is a loss of voice not only for her concerns about the church situation, but also in her relationship with her husband.

⁵ Ephesians 5:23b.

Men can become vulnerable to the destructive use of uninhibited power, although this impact is often subtle, unnoticed, or defended as biblical. Instead of working as a team and dialoguing together about issues, discussions are often relegated to ‘men only’ conversations.

Conversely, the minimizing of traditional feminine roles by the societal influence of popular feminist voices, in subtle ways, affects the sense of personhood for women living in traditional communities. While popular Christian feminist thought attempts to offer solutions to the silencing and abuse of women, the influence of the reconstruction of gender values can negatively affect the identity of women living in traditional communities. The popular feminist movement, responding to the abuses of women living in traditional patriarchal settings, reacts to the emphasis of servant roles relegated to women over the centuries. Predominant male leadership is understood as unjust to women; thus, justice and inequality become the primary focuses of feminists. In larger Christian circles, including more contemporary Anabaptist settings, pastoral positions and ordination for women are examples of the restructured values of gender roles. Although conservative Anabaptist women as a whole have no expectation or aspiration for pastoral leadership, the issue of having a voice in the life of the church is a significant issue with which to grapple.

While conservative Anabaptists live, in the eyes of many, sequestered from the common culture, there is a subtle impact from the popular feminist voices upon women in traditional conservative Anabaptist communities. Like Emily, in our first opening vignette, stay-at-home motherhood can feel confining and minimizing.

Throughout the twentieth century, affluence and the use of technology have presented conservative Anabaptist communities with perplexing choices. Exposure to popular feminism can bring uneasiness to women embracing traditional values.

An example of this conundrum would be mothers of young children feeling pressure to find employment outside of the home setting. The technological world can present increased financial needs. Working outside of the home to bring a second income to the family budget brings more financial freedom, while the traditional value of mothers in the home feels less desirable. The pressures created by our affluent American culture can challenge the conservative Anabaptist worldview of a simple lifestyle. Simplicity in this worldview emphasizes an avoidance of excesses and focuses on values such as gardening; food preservation, like canning and freezing of produce; and stay-at-home mothering, all of which enables a family to live on a single salary. A closer look at these opposing and conflicting voices helps one understand the difficulty, confusion, and even isolation that surrounds women who desire to embrace the traditional roles of women.

A deeper problem emerges that is worthy of our consideration. Hidden in the shadows of the conservative Anabaptist tradition lurks a compelling question. What are some of the foundational biblical principles, which substantiate the traditional identity held for women in a patriarchal Anabaptist community? Do women bring anything of significance to a patriarchal system? Was the Creator's plan for women living in a conservative Anabaptist community to be relegated to insignificance in a world where men hold the public leadership roles? How can one gain an understanding of the heart of the feminine while embracing a patriarchal worldview? Effectively wrestling with these questions for conservative Anabaptists requires seeking an understanding of how the

feminine, in a traditional way, reveals the image and glory of God, and some of the biblical accounts that reflect the feminine images of God. It goes back to the biblical narratives of the beginning of time, when God created humankind, both male and female, in His image.

An exploration of biblical femininity through a traditional conservative Anabaptist lens becomes paramount for effectively grappling with the failures, weaknesses, and abuses of patriarchy. But even more primary is a search to discover the biblical foundations of the traditional view of the conservative Anabaptist feminine and how it uniquely bears the image of God. This is essential for assisting women in traditional settings to discover and embrace a life of shalom as they press into their creative design.

Before exploring these concepts, a brief description of Anabaptists will clarify the focus of this writing. This dissertation will address women from current, conservative Anabaptists communities.

Who Are the Anabaptists?

American Anabaptists trace their roots to a movement that was born in Europe during the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation of the church, a time of dissent against the Roman Catholic Church. Anabaptism has become known as the “radical reformation.”⁶ While Anabaptist beginnings were contemporary to other reformers including Luther (Lutheran) and Zwingli (Reformed), the Anabaptists ultimately believed

⁶ John D. Roth, “Recent Currents in the Historiography of the Radical Reformation,” *Church History* 71 no. 03 (2002): 525.

the Protestant reformation faltered, becoming compromised and incomplete.⁷ Anabaptists stood firmly on the doctrinal beliefs of adult believer's baptism and separation of church and state, with a strong emphasis on the discipleship of the community of believers.⁸ During this troubled time of church history, adult believer's baptism was addressed by local authorities with capital punishment; consequently, severe persecution of Anabaptists ensued.⁹ Thousands of Anabaptists experienced martyrdom for their faith throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁰

J.C. Wenger writes of Swiss Anabaptism, "it was a sound and Biblical faith, stressing the preaching of the Gospel, a free and voluntary commitment to Christ, baptism as a sign of one's faith in Christ and of the intention to live a life of Christian discipleship . . . free of state control, but exercising a firm discipline over its members."¹¹ Conservative Anabaptists continue to be known as Biblicists,¹² using literal interpretation of Scriptures with an emphasis on leading a simple life without encroachment from the "outside world."

⁷ Cornelius J. Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History; a Popular History of the Anabaptists and the Mennonites* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981), 36.

⁸ Beulah Stauffer Hostetler, *American Mennonites and Protestant Movements: A Community Paradigm* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987), 87.

⁹ Alan Kreider, "The Servant Is Not Greater than His Master: The Anabaptists and the Suffering Church," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 58, no. 1 (1984). This article overviews the Anabaptist martyrdom and suffering that became a central focus of Anabaptist theology as cross-bearing followers of Christ.

¹⁰ Cornelius J. Dyck, "The Suffering Church in Anabaptism," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 59, no. 1 (1985): 5, 15.

¹¹ J.C. Wenger and Harold Stauffer Bender, *The Mennonite Church in America, Sometimes Called Old Mennonites* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1966), 33.

¹² William Roscoe Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 15.

Passionate commitment to radical discipleship to Christ and ongoing severe persecution in the European homelands of Germany, Switzerland, France, and the Netherlands led to large numbers of Anabaptists immigrating to America, beginning in the late seventeenth century.¹³ William Penn, a Quaker from England who received a large land grant from King Charles II, assisted many Anabaptists to purchase land and settle in Pennsylvania. His “objective was to establish a colony where unwanted religious groups could find refuge.” “Thus began Penn’s ‘Holy Experiment,’ where many godless activities were prohibited.”¹⁴

Beulah Stauffer Hostetler, Mennonite historical writer, accurately states it like this: “The Mennonite form of church government was particularly vulnerable to schism.”¹⁵ Already in Europe, a more conservative Anabaptist group, the Amish schism, was established in 1693, while multiple new schisms developed in America over the course of the centuries.¹⁶ Conservative elements of these schisms with emphasis on maintaining traditional practices continue today. The women of these conservative communities are the focus of this dissertation.

In her book, *Mennonite Women, A Story of God’s Faithfulness, 1683-1983*, Elaine Sommers Rich chronicles the stories of many Mennonite women spanning a three-hundred-year span. The book narrates amazing stories of courageous women, pioneers who mothered many children, risking their lives to give birth and raise large families. In

¹³ Dyck, 188.

¹⁴ Hostetler, 23.

¹⁵ Ibid., 126.

¹⁶ Ibid, 31. Hostetler chronicles a detailed account of the many schisms and influences that impacted the Anabaptist communities in America, 125-149.

the chapter entitled “Mothers,” she recounts the stories of seven exemplary women¹⁷ who through their motherhood have offered sacrificial love and service to their families and communities.

Barbara Bachman Heiser Eyer, who early in her marriage became a widow with three small children, “is remembered still by her grandchildren for the delicious angel food cakes and huge sugar cookies she made...[h]er garden was bordered by neat beds of chives and other herbs. . . Barbara’s spirit did not fail. . . because of her trust in God.”¹⁸

Adella Brunk Kanagy echoes traditional values in her tribute of her mother.

Today I see Mama’s ninety years of ordinary living as a witness to her faith, as a pattern, as an unspoken statement of values. . . The loving doing of sharing with neighbors, attending sewing circle faithfully, helping quilt for relief, piecing quilts and knitting afghans for children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, . . .¹⁹

she names as bringing value to her mother’s life.

These narratives give voice to the behind-the-scenes contributions of women in traditional Anabaptist communities. Like the gospel narrative of the widow’s mite, and the cup of cold water offered in the name of Jesus which is noted at the end of time, these narratives reflect often uncounted and unnoticed contributions to the kingdom of Jesus. Although this concept is not for women alone, it gives fabric to the concept of “veiled glory,” which our study of the feminine images of God reveals through the exploration of the feminine elements of the Shekinah glory of God.

¹⁷ Elaine Sommers Rich, *Mennonite Women: A Story of God's Faithfulness, 1683-1983* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983), 57.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

Defining the Feminine in the Conservative Anabaptist Tradition

Definitions for what it means to be feminine have become a current matter of debate. One researcher defines the essential feminine construct as to “construe gender as resident within the individual,” which “portray[s] gender in terms of fundamental attributes that are conceived as internal, persistent, and generally separate from the on-going experience of interaction with the daily sociopolitical contexts of one’s life.”²⁰ Conversely, a constructionist views the feminine as “not resident in the person but [femininity] exists in those interactions that are socially construed as gendered.”²¹

The definition and meaning of the feminine for conservative Anabaptists rests on the authoritative view that the Scriptures hold in conservative Anabaptist theology. As Estep writes, “The Bible became and remained for [Anabaptists] the supreme judicature by which all human opinions were to be tried.”²² In the early twentieth century, one writer notes, “Mennonitism everywhere still includes a belief that the teachings and writings of the New Testament were intended to be literally observed.”²³

This premise of the authoritative and literal interpretation of Scripture lends itself more to the essential view of the feminine, understood as ‘that which is resident within a woman.’ Conversely, constructionists believe that “the foundational assertion of social constructionism is that we have no way of knowing with certainty the nature of reality.”²⁴

²⁰ Janis S. Bohan, “Essentialism, Constructionism, and Feminist Psychology” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 17 no. 1 (1993): 6, 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

²² Estep, 140.

²³ Hostetler, 277.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

This opposes the Anabaptist adherence to the literal and authoritative view of the Scripture and its revelation of the nature of reality.

The intent of this writing is to discover the essential feminine images with which women have been created, by discovering the feminine images of God revealed in the Scriptures, viewed as literal and authoritative by conservative Anabaptists. While we are all impacted greatly by the community in which we live, and have constructed caveats for living in our environment, the discovery of core feminine images of God will assist conservative Anabaptist women in their feminine identity.

Identifying Weaknesses in a Patriarchal Community

Rachel Held Evans, popular Christian author and blogger, writes of her rejection of the traditional patriarchal order of church.

Christian patriarchy is often illustrated as a series of umbrellas in which the male leadership of the church holds authority over the male leaders of their homes who hold authority of the women and children at the bottom of the hierarchy.

This authority structure is typically described as a series of “coverings” or “protections” but unfortunately, the effect is often the opposite, as abused women and children find they have no recourse or power, as every decision in their lives must be made by a series of men, many of whom are more invested in protecting the reputation of the ministry than the people in it.

Having talked at length with survivors of abuse in a Christian environment, I hear similar themes repeated over and over again. They speak of church cultures that treated women’s bodies as inherently problematic and seductive, that assigned a woman’s worth to her sexual purity or procreative prowess, that questioned women’s ability to think rationally or make decisions without the leadership of men, that blamed victims of sexual abuse for inviting the abuse or tempting the abuser, that shamed women who did not “joyfully submit” to their husband and find contentment in their roles as helpers and homemakers, and that effectively silenced victims of abuse by telling women and children that reporting the crime would reflect poorly on the church and thus damage the reputation of Christ. These women describe an environment of fear in which they learned to

distrust their own instincts and desires, which made it hard to report, or even acknowledge the abuse.²⁵

In subtle terms, Evans appears to be describing the teachings of Bill Gothard, popular seminar speaker in the eighties and nineties, whose teachings emphasize the authoritative structuring of leadership that many conservative Anabaptists follow. Recent allegations of Gothard's ongoing sexual advances toward women under his leadership,²⁶ heightens the need for scrutiny of patriarchal leadership practices.

Evans effectively lays her finger on the profound weaknesses found in some patriarchal communities. This emphasizes the absolute need of Christian communities that embrace a patriarchal system of leadership to evaluate how their church structure might violate the true nature, heart, and direction for servant leadership, the core structure of the Kingdom of Jesus.²⁷ While Evans' critique carries a critical call for radical scrutiny, a wholesale dismissal of patriarchy endangers, for those embracing traditional values, the loss of the traditional understanding of significant elements of the image and glory of God.

Many factors can increase the likelihood of the abuse of women by men. Objectification of women with pornography, some oppressive dress standards, and individualism that devalues those who are different from us, violates our creative design and the call to disciples of the kingdom of Jesus.

²⁵ Rachel Held Evans, "Patriarchy and Abusive Churches," Rachel Held Evans, March 14, 2014, accessed May 16, 2014, <http://rachelheldevans.com/blog/patriarchy-abuse>.

²⁶ Warren Cole Smith, "IBLP's Longtime Leader Steps Down Amid Allegations of Sexual Harrassment," Warren Cole Smith, March 7, 2014, accessed January 1, 2016, <http://www.worldmag.com/2014/03/bill-gothard-resigns-from-ministry>.

²⁷ Luke 22:26.

Failure to view women as individuals bearing critical elements of the image and glory of God, leads to women becoming objects for a man's pleasure. The objectification of women through the pervasive use of pornography undoubtedly affects how men relate to women. The Covenant Eyes organization, working to bring exposure, accountability, and healing to the sexually broken in the church, reports these observations and statistics.

Pornography is prevalent everywhere today. In fact, one in eight online searches is for pornography. Because porn use thrives in secrecy, many church members are trapped in a cycle of sin and shame, thinking that they are the only ones facing this temptation.

- 51% of pastors say Internet pornography is a possible temptation.
- 50% of all Christian men and 20% of all Christian women say they are addicted to pornography.
- 75% of pastors do not make themselves accountable to anyone for their Internet use.
- Regular church attendees are 26% less likely to look at porn; *however, self-identified "fundamentalists" are 91% more likely to look at porn.*²⁸

Objectification of another person is an assault on the personhood, another person uniquely designed and loved by the Creator. Abuse of women not only negatively affects men, but also the ongoing objectification women experience distorts one's sense of personhood. The Covenant Eyes findings expose the pervasive objectification of women in "fundamentalist" groups, which share common ground with conservative Anabaptists, and, consistent with the thesis of this writing, put women within these groups at risk of abuse.

Our third opening vignette finds Barbara caught in the abusive advances of her brother. Young men raised in religious, non-relational homes where male dominance is normal, become significantly more vulnerable to abusive behavior. Maturing boys lack respect for women or an understanding of the sanctity of sexuality when parents and

²⁸ Covenant Eyes, Internet Accountability and Filtering, accessed January 25, 2014, <http://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/>, italics added.

church leadership provide little or no instruction. Sexual issues become relegated to a shame-based, barnyard experience with little sense of the biblical design and intention of sexuality.

Objectification of women can happen in the opposite extreme. When women are required to abide by strict and oppressive dress standards, designed by dominate male leadership, a paradoxical form of objectification may occur. In this type of setting, men objectify women, in subtler ways, as sexual objects to be covered and controlled. In some situations, this may actually promote the abuse it is trying to avoid.

Women who are victims of sexual abuse of any nature experience devastating and often long-term effects to their personhood. Shame, anger, and contempt describe some of the common internal responses to abuse, requiring help from someone who understands what brings healing from this devastation.

Dan Allender, a Christian counselor who has focused for decades on the treatment of victims of early childhood abuse, finds the natural responses to the abusive harm to be a profound shame described as a “hemorrhage of the soul.”²⁹ The intolerable pain of shame leads to contempt, described as a deep bitterness toward one’s own personhood, toward another person, or toward both simultaneously. This self-protective strategy interferes with one’s ability to live life with passion and inner freedom. Facing the internal pain of victimization becomes the doorway to finding a redemptive life of wholeness. It is often a long, convoluted journey to internal peace, requiring a trusted person to journey alongside, as the victim learns to allow God to offer care and nurture through this caregiver. The hidden scenes and details of one’s story hold the pain and

²⁹ Dan B. Allender, *The Wounded Heart* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1990), 61.

loss. Change in one's internal world is often ineffective without a grief journey that involves narrating and processing the pain and losses with a skilled caregiver.

This is actually not a brand new problem, but one that was active during the Old Testament time of the Judges. In one of the darkest times of Israel's biblical history, a repeated theme of rebuke was that "... there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes."³⁰ It was in this fallen state of humankind, during the time of the Judges that patriarchy led to a horrific account of abuse.

A priest, traveling with his concubine, arrived at a city to spend the night. To save himself from violent men in pursuit of him, he sent his concubine out to appease them. "[S]o they raped and abused her all night until morning, then let her go at the approach of dawn."³¹ She was found dead on the threshold of the doorstep the next morning. He cut her in twelve pieces and "sent her throughout the territory of Israel."³² This account exemplifies the horrors of patriarchal abuse in its utter extreme. It also reveals the second-class standard for women. Women became powerless scapegoats in a patriarchal world where religious leaders use their power to victimize and excuse themselves for their choices.

This dark time in Israel's history reveals the evil that ensues when God's children stray from God's law and direction. While mandates of God's Old Testament law are no longer applicable to us since the life and death of Jesus, the beauty of God's heart for His

³⁰Judges 17:6.

³¹ Judges 19:25.

³² Judges 19:29.

children can be known in both eras of the Scriptures when followers of the Father are committed to live into the mandates of Scripture.

These examples of the violence and failures of the traditional patriarchal community expose the vulnerability to violation of the biblical directives that the traditional conservative Anabaptists community must face. It adds credence to the intention of this paper, to help women in conservative Anabaptist communities find their identity through discovery of the feminine images of God, which can bring substance and hope to their lives.

The Zohar, Jewish mystical writings while patriarchal, emphasizes “the importance of [a man] treating one’s wife with the utmost love, honor and respect . . . making every attempt to elevate his wife to the highest level.”³³ This Jewish understanding of the masculine informs a man of how he is to relate to the feminine. This instruction, based on the Jewish understanding of the Shekinah, viewed as the feminine aspect of God’s image and glory, describes God’s presence with Israel in the wilderness. This opposes male domination, which robs women of their personal space and strips them of their dignity and a sense of self

A fascinating study compares women who embrace orthodox, traditional, and feminist positions among the Jewish community. The author notes that recent research builds around “the notion that traditional, conservative religions, which have been historically patriarchal, are immanently contradictory to feminism’s basic premises of

³³ Philip S. Berg, *The Essential Zohar: The Source of Kabbalistic Wisdom* (New York: Bell Tower, 2002), 91, 92.

gender equality.”³⁴ The researchers found, though, that the traditional women, while choosing against the rigidity of the Orthodox, found embracing traditional values to be enriching to their lives. They, as well as “contemporary evangelicals hold to a symbolic traditionalism and a pragmatic egalitarianism . . . consciously choosing to be identified as such.”³⁵

These findings are pertinent to women from the traditional Anabaptist community. In my years of counseling with conservative Anabaptist women who are members of communities led primarily by men, I find women often struggling with the tension in their desire to embrace traditional feminine roles juxtaposed by their desire for identity and voice.

This work proposes to show that women in traditional, conservative Anabaptist communities can find their identity through the discovery of the feminine images of God, and in doing so, find substance and hope in their lives. The word image simply communicates how women are created to show a likeness to God by creational design. Although more hidden, through the metaphor of ‘veiled glory,’ we will find that this presence is no less important, but has significant personal presence to bring to bear in her world.

Summary

The biblical images of the feminine aspects of God’s image offer a reframing of identity for women in conservative Anabaptist communities. Through the metaphor of

³⁴ Yaacov Yadgar, “Gender, Religion, and Feminism: The Case of Jewish Israeli Traditionalists,” *Journal of Scientific Study of Religion* 45, no. 3 (September 2006): 354. Accessed October 8, 2012, EBSCOhost.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 354.

veiled glory, we will explore how the Shekinah images in Scripture reflect the image of God as mother, as intuitive wisdom, one Who brings delight and invites pursuit, while working in harmony with the Creator.

Women in biblical times reveal this sense of veiled glory as they participate in the great Story of redemption that the Lord is telling from the beginning to the end. The mysteries of the kingdom invite women from the traditional Anabaptist communities to find shalom in a life filled with passion and purpose.

SECTION II: ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

Introduction

Approaches to addressing the issues of women in conservative patriarchal communities such as conservative Anabaptists are varied, ranging from finding patriarchal leadership as a violation of the gospel message to the opposite extreme of requiring women unquestioning submission to male leadership. Some approaches seek to negotiate between these extremes to help women embrace the beauty and joy ascribed to the position of ‘helpmeet’ and mothering.

A literature review describing alternative solutions to this work include the following categories.

- Theological Constructs of Gender

Wayne A. Grudem, *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*.

- Finding Joy and Life Through Motherhood

Leslie Ludy, *Set-Apart Motherhood, Reflecting Joy and Beauty in Family Life*

- Woman as Man’s Helper

Debi Pearl, *Created to Be His Help Meet*

Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *Biblical Womanhood in the Home*

- Complementarian Genders

John D. Garr, *Coequal and Counterbalanced, God’s Blueprint for Woman & Men*

- Historical Overview of Women in the Radical Reformation

Joyce L. Irwin, *Womanhood in Radical Protestantism, 1525-1675*.

Theological Constructs of Gender

Grudem, Wayne A. *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002.

This book provides a conservative exegetical, lineal response to the writings of Christian feminists and their discussions critiquing traditionally held interpretations of Scriptures regarding women's roles in both the home and the church. Edited by Wayne Grudem, a staunch complementarian, ten chapters are written by ten different biblical scholars including sections overviewing the debate, the glory of man and woman as created by God, resolving the disputed questions, and standing against the culture.

Through a defensive and argumentative tone, the document seeks to prove the rightness of the traditional view of men and women's roles in the church. An example of this is a lengthy discussion of the interpretations of the word translated as "head" in Ephesians 5:23, which traditionally is understood as "one in authority." Feminist writer Dr. Kroeger takes issue with this rendering because it implies inferiority, citing Chrysostom and other writings of early church fathers to rethink the meaning and nature of male leadership in the church, against which the writer of this chapter pushes back.¹

What seems absent from the arguments of the book is any credence to the relational aspects of marriage and relationships in the church, which women bring to bear, and how this reveals the feminine aspects of God's image and glory. With the strong exegetical presentation, the entire document offers a logical argument one could deem as masculine in nature, thus lacking the relational counterbalance that could offer

¹ Wayne A. Grudem, ed., *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 148.

depth and intrigue to the presentation in support of traditional roles for men and women. Image and metaphor employed by Scripture are lacking from this presentation.

Finding Joy and Life Through Motherhood

Ludy, Leslie, *Set-apart Motherhood: Reflecting Joy and Beauty in Family Life*. Np: NavPress, 2014, Print.

In this book expounding on the joys of motherhood, Leslie Ludy says, “God has called me to motherhood, with all of its interruptions, inconveniences, and intensities.”² The author attempts to encourage women by sharing vision for what she labels ‘set-apart motherhood.’ Through passionate images, Ludy envisions mothering as a ‘sacred call,’ bringing joy to ones family as she creates a sanctuary, establishes healthy routines, and savors precious moments.

Ludy believes deeply in the significance of a woman’s call to motherhood. The author shares biblical and practical advice with excitement and energy. At the end of each chapter, discussion ideas offer ways of making the material practical. Conservative Anabaptist women will find this book inspiring as they mother young children. While providing excellent resources for these mothers, this book represents an alternative solution to the dissertation problem because the book does not note that mothering reveals a part of the feminine image of God.

Woman as Man’s Helper

DeMoss, Nancy Leigh., ed. *Biblical Womanhood in the Home*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002.

² Leslie Ludy, *Set-apart Motherhood: Reflecting Joy and Beauty in Family Life*. (NP: NavPress, 2014), 21.

DeMoss's collection of essays expounds on the virtues of womanhood centered in the home as a 'helper' to her husband, or to men in her sphere of influence. Sections in this book include the glory of womanhood as created by God, the challenge of biblical womanhood in a fallen world, the freedom of women as helpers, and, finally, the joy of women as bearers and nurtures of life. The common theme running through the chapters is a defense of the traditional roles of women and how they promote godly Christian living.

In the chapter entitled "Daddy's Girl" by Mary A. Kassian, the author notes that "God is our Father," but names mother images of God as feminine analogies.³ She goes on to describe how these "mother-like analogies lead to "many in the Christian community minimizing or even denying the importance of the name of "Father" for God," thus leading to gender neutral renderings of God.⁴ This position would inadvertently engender God as male, while the feminine qualities of God only as analogies. This definition seems to promote that God is male, while feminine terms are only analogies. I believe all gender terms for God are analogies, although the masculine references to God are traditionally used in the Scriptures. This approach also fails to acknowledge how women in traditional settings can find a sense of true significance by embracing the traditional understanding of the feminine to reveal also something significant about God, albeit different in expression.

Susan Hunt, in her chapter on "How to Raise Feminine Daughters" discusses how equality "does not preclude gender distinctiveness." She draws from Genesis Chapter

³ Nancy Leigh DeMoss, ed., *Biblical Womanhood in the Home* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 48.

⁴ Ibid.

Two to support the design of “helper” for the woman, because “It is not good for man to be alone... because he was created in the image of the Triune God.”⁵ While this names the design of God relationally through the Trinity, it does not acknowledge the feminine elements of God that work together in harmony with the masculine images.

Pearl, Debi. *Created to Be His Help Meet: Discover How God Can Make Your Marriage Glorious*. Pleasantville, TN: No Greater Joy Ministries, 2004.

Although Pearl’s work is not a highly academic volume, as a popular book in some conservative Anabaptist settings, this book shows an alternative view of the identity of women in traditional settings and to the dissertation problem. From a strongly patriarchal and authoritative stance, the book seeks to show the role of women to be a “perfect help meet,” with the calling of “a readiness to please.”⁶

Basing her theology of gender on 1 Corinthians 11:7, Debi Pearl believes that men are created in the image of God, while women are “the glory of the man.”⁷ She states that the woman is understood to be God’s gift to man. “This is how God created you and it is your purpose for existing.”⁸

The emphasis throughout the book places a lot of pressure on women to serve men with a lack of opinion and voice. This emphasis inadvertently places the responsibility for a man’s behavior upon his wife. The book proposes that, like Adam, “when a man loves a woman and wants to make her happy, he will often acquiesce in

⁵ Ibid, 151.

⁶ Debi Pearl, *Created to Be His Help Meet: Discover How God Can Make Your Marriage Glorious* (Pleasantville, TN: No Greater Joy Ministries, 2004), 23.

⁷ Ibid., 118.

⁸ Ibid., 21.

spiritual matters because of the affection he holds for her in his heart.”⁹ In a discussion on a man’s propensity to anger, this statement declares, “It is common for wives to be the cause of their husband’s bitter anger.”¹⁰ This emphasis actually victimizes a man, making him to appear weak and unable to make healthy choices that would enable him to make life giving relational choices with his wife.

Certainly, a woman is responsible for her own reactions and choices, but this book avoids shedding positive light on the God-given strengths and abilities of women. It thus misses critical feminine elements of the image and glory of God, as presented in Scripture, which bring harmony and synergy through mutual nurture and care for the marriage relationship.

It is revealing to note that at the end of the book are listed the Scripture passages to support Pearl’s writings. Every chapter of Proverbs is listed *except* Proverbs 8, which this dissertation finds central in understanding the feminine image of God women are called to bear.

Complementarian Genders

Garr, John D. *Coequal and Counterbalanced, God's Blueprint for Women and Men*. Atlanta: Golden Key Press, 2012.

This document provides excellent research and discussion of the traditional view of the intention and design of the Creator provided in the gender distinctions of the masculine and the feminine. Exploring original word roots and meanings in the Hebrew texts as well as biological differences of the genders, this document provides substance to the counterbalanced intention of the Creator’s design. The fragile synergy designed by

⁹ Ibid., 111.

¹⁰ Ibid., 238.

these gender differences brings a sense of completeness and harmony to the divine intention of the Creator.

Nuanced differences from the thesis of this dissertation exist worthy of consideration. Quoting writer Torjesen, Garr asserts that it was “the ancient Greek and Roman societies which had established definitive systems of gendered virtues wherein “men were assigned the virtues of courage, justice, and self-mastery,” while “women were assigned the virtues of chastity, silence, and obedience.”” Garr finds that “the virtues assigned to men were public, while virtues assigned to women were private”... finding these to be “ignorant at best and diabolical at worst.”¹¹ Garr writes further, “One expression of humanity is not evil and the other good. Both are part of the greater ‘very good’ whole.”¹² One could extrapolate from this argument that the author considers the private approach for women to be evil, while the public presentation of men is ‘good.’

Much of what Garr is proposing stand in agreement with the dissertation project, that significant differences between the genders are of design and intended for wholeness and completion in the human family, and that there have been significant abuses and harmful silencing of the feminine over the centuries of Christianity. Garr takes issue with the more ‘private’ virtue of women, presenting an alternate view to the thesis of ‘veiled glory,’ as embraced in the traditional Anabaptist community. Garr seems to view ‘private,’ as ‘bad,’ while that which one can see is deemed ‘good.’ Garr’s reaction to the ‘private’ traditional stance for women opposes embracing the more hidden elements of God’s image.

¹¹ John D. Garr, *Coequal and Counterbalanced, God's Blueprint for Women and Men* (Atlanta: Golden Key Press, 2012), 190.

¹² Ibid.

A Historical Work Exploring Women in the Radical Reformation

Irwin, Joyce L. *Womanhood in Radical Protestantism, 1525-1675*. Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1979.

While Joyce Irwin acknowledges that Anabaptists do not consider themselves as Protestant, because the group is considered a significant element of the Radical Reformation, and because of the parallel elements of social upheaval the various “radical” groups brought to the Reformation period, she includes Anabaptists in her research of the status of women during this period.

Irwin writes that the intention of her book is to “present evidence which would allow the reader to evaluate” statements about practices of equality for men and women in Anabaptist and other radical Reformation groups.¹³ She attempts to provide historic data to respond to writers who believe the Anabaptist radical reformers “practiced complete equality of women and men in every respect, including preaching.”¹⁴

While the radical reformation restructured the liturgical community and women as well as men participated in adult believers’ baptism, Irwin sites the writings of Menno Simons that continue the traditional role of women. “Menno... wanted women to remain in their traditional, inconspicuous place. His most revolutionary thought in this area seems to have been the denial of a husband’s right to beat his wife . . . [o]therwise Menno appears to confine women in their homes and clothes even more than sixteenth-century society in general.”¹⁵

¹³ Joyce L. Irwin, *Womanhood in Radical Protestantism, 1525-1675* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1979), xiv.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, xv.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, taken from *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons (c.1496-1561)*, trans. Leonard Verduin, ed. John Christian Wenger (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 376-383.

While Irwin does an excellent job of researching the role of and thought about women in the Radical Reformation, the underlying message of her material is to show the pervasiveness of the narrow limits the movement placed on the lives of women. One of the focuses of the Radical Reformation was to “gain acceptance for clerical marriages, [therefore] they had to demonstrate that marriage had some virtues over celibacy,”¹⁶ this did not change the roles to which women were relegated.

The underlying message of the book, in subtle ways, seems to align itself with the feminist position. In spite of the fact that the Radical Reformation, of which Anabaptism was a part, brought societal change to the established state church, there was a pervasive notion of suppressive patriarchal community with the domination of women. In our current academic culture, it is difficult to envision that women in this era found significant spiritual life in their traditional role as participants in this radically reforming community, yet there are numerous accounts of devoted and joyful women who became willing martyrs for the cause of their faith.

This book provides valuable historical sketches of the roles of women in the infancy of Anabaptism. Numerous quotations show the dominating and demeaning of women’s roles in marriage and the community, seen by male writers to be supported by Scripture. The book fails to trace any evidence of Anabaptist women finding life and hope through their feminine image of God.

Summary

The books in this literature review all contribute to the discussion of the importance of what the feminine brings to her world. The themes of motherhood, helper,

¹⁶ Ibid., xxiii.

and influence, both for ill and good, bear weight worthy of consideration. Submission is a biblical construct, for both genders in their own unique modes, but can become misunderstood and misused.

Understanding how the genders each reveal significant and unique elements of the image of God assists us in our understanding of who God is and helps to enhance relationships in conservative Anabaptist communities. Understanding how the elements of co-equality of genders, motherhood, and homemaking contribute to our view of the image of God brings missing puzzle pieces to the discussion of how God reveals Himself through humankind.

SECTION III: THE THESIS

Introduction

Biblical Feminine Images of God

At first glance, because of the pervasive use of overtly masculine names and pronouns, those instructed in patriarchal communities might dispute the presence of feminine images of God in Scripture, yet significant elements of femininity are found embedded throughout the authoritative, inspired, inerrant canon of God's Word. Conversely, this should come as no surprise as one acknowledges that from the beginning humanity was created in the image of God, male and female. While traditional communities embrace the masculine essence of God's image as Father, King, Shepherd, and Warrior, to name a few such images, hidden in the shadows of Scripture are the feminine images that reveal significant elements, which bring wholesomeness to our understanding of the God we worship.

Considerable research has been done around gender and the image of God.

Researchers Lambert and Kurpius found that

people with more traditional attitudes toward women will be more likely to see God as male (father, brother, man) than as female (mother, sister, woman) and more likely to see God with masculine characteristics (active, all-knowing, controller of our fate, creator, guide, intimidating, judge, lawmaker, life-taker, logical, Messiah, powerful, protector, punishing, relentless, strong, superior, unafraid, wise) rather than God with feminine characteristics (beautiful, comforting, compassionate, gentle, giving, life-giver, listener, loving, nurturer, nice, peaceful, precious, pure, spiritual, welcoming).¹

¹ Christina D. Lambert and Sharon E. Robinson Kurpius, "Relationship of Gender Role Identity and Attitudes with Images of God," *American Journal of Pastoral Counseling* 7, no. 2 (2005): 70, accessed March 28, 2014, doi:10.1300/J062v07n02_05.

Exploring the Scriptures to discover the feminine elements of God's image and glory offers significant fabric to our discussion for women in conservative Anabaptist communities. Discovering and embracing these feminine aspects of the glory and image of God as revealed in Scripture stands essential in assisting women in conservative Anabaptist communities to find an abundance of purpose and shalom in their identity and praxis.

The beginning section of this document will explore how the biblical understanding of the Shekinah glory in the Old Testament reveals the feminine aspect of God's image. An exploration of Scripture and traditional rabbinic and mystical Jewish thought shapes this discussion. The next section focusses on Proverbs Eight, exploring another biblical feminine image of God. Presented as the counterpart of the Creator, Lady Wisdom enriches our understanding of what the divine feminine brings to bear through Her presence. The metaphor of Veiled Glory will further inform the pursuit of understanding how the Shekinah motif and Lady Wisdom bring substance to the feminine aspects of God's image. The themes of motherhood, mystery, wisdom, hiddenness, modesty, and veiling all enhance this discussion.

Women of the Scriptures, both in the Old and New Testaments, exemplify the beauty and power of the Shekinah image in their lives. A retelling of the biblical narratives of women in Scripture offers powerful exemplary insight into the beauty of the feminine image of God. The account of Samson's mother, Abigail, and Queen Esther in the Old Testament, followed by Mary the mother of Jesus, the city woman with the alabaster box who anointed Jesus, and Mary Magdalene from the New Testament provide insight into the construct of 'veiled glory.' Through a living, vital relationship with the

presence of Jesus, women today also exemplify ‘veiled glory.’ Transformation of one’s personal identity and voice into the image of God comes through one’s spiritual formation journey.

The last section of this document will acknowledge that in one’s humanity, conservative Anabaptist women are unable to carry out the veiled glory image of the Shekinah presence through self-effort. Active pursuit of relationship with Jesus involves the spiritual disciplines of Scripture, prayer, meditation, silence, and solitude, ushering in the presence and blessing of Jesus to one’s heart. God’s Spirit transforms the feminine heart, veiled, yet ignited by the presence of God’s Shekinah image, reflected into the hearts of women, and into her world.

Created in the Image of God: Masculine and Feminine

One can trace gender distinction, and how it reveals the image of God in humankind, to the opening chapters of the Creation account in the Christian Scriptures. Genesis documents that God made humankind in His image, making them male and female.² God took something from the male, a rib, to begin His fashioning of the woman. By implication, He added things to fashion the woman, giving her substance not found in the man. While they both had some substance alike, the “rib,” they had elements differing. The Creator brought them together, to bring completion to God’s image and to live in the harmony of God’s perfect creation.³

The creation account reveals that both genders, the male and the female, were designed in the image of God. This dual balance was set into motion before the Fall and

² Genesis 1:27.

³ Genesis 2:18-25.

its consequences described in Genesis Chapter Three. This can be a startling thought, especially to those who live in traditional communities. We worship God, our Father, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit. The biblical text addresses all three Persons of the Trinity with masculine names and pronouns. This masculine language has been sustained through thousands of years of biblical history. Hidden in the shadows of the Scriptural texts one finds feminine images of God, more subtle, yet profoundly present.

Patriarchy and the Feminine

Until recent years, men have primarily held the leadership roles for families and religious settings throughout the ages of Christian history. God covenanted for allegiance with Abraham, the progenitor of the Jewish people, promising Abraham that he would become the patriarchal father of multitudes of children. Theologian Leon R. Kass understands the primary role of patriarchy to be about teaching men to be “proper husbands and fathers” through the “task of transmitting their moral and spiritual heritage.”⁴ “This transmission is at the heart of the meaning of marriage. In marriage rightly understood, man will cleave to his wife not because she is ‘flesh of his flesh,’ nor because she is beautiful or because she loves him back, but because she is his coequal partner in the work of perpetuation.”⁵ Kass goes on to note a common theme coming through Jewish literature: “Abraham, who [is] like most men, needs much more instruction in these matters [the task of transmitting heritage] than does his wife.”⁶

⁴ Leon Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 297.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

This transmission of heritage becomes a core foundational element of Jewish teaching threaded into the Psalms. “And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Thy strength to this generation, Thy power to all who are to come. For Thy righteousness, O God, reaches to the heavens, Thou who hast done great things; O God, who is like Thee?”⁷

For He established a testimony in Jacob, And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, That they should teach them to their children, That the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, That they may arise and tell them to their children, That they should put their confidence in God, And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments, and not be like their fathers, A stubborn and rebellious generation, A generation that did not prepare its heart, And whose spirit was not faithful to God.⁸

God Wants to Be Known

One could posit from this discussion that the initiation of patriarchy is at its core about God wanting to make Himself known to His people, to His Creation. Patriarchy is the vehicle through which this charge of the perpetuation of making God known was accomplished. As we explore both Scripture and traditional Jewish literature, we can ascertain that the Creational Plan is the blending of the efforts of the masculine and feminine together through which this mandate of perpetuation is accomplished.

As New Testament believers, we ascertain that Jesus, second Person of the Trinity, became the fullness of representation of the Father.⁹ While Jesus erased the eternal consequences of the Fall, opening the door to a new and living relationship with the Holy Trinity, His life, death, and resurrection did not change the Creational elements

⁷ Psalm 70:18, 19.

⁸ Psalm 78:5b-8.

⁹ John 14:9.

set in motion in the beginning. The foundational elements of the times and seasons, the order of the Creation from the beginning, yet stands. This does not dismiss the fact that the Fall has affected gender relationships.

Exploring how femininity in the conservative Anabaptist culture participates in and enhances the perpetuation of the revelation of God to the world offers women a hope for meaningful purpose and identity. This requires untangling what conservative Anabaptists understand to be creational elements, designed in the beginning of time, from the distortions of the Creator's purposes caused by the impact of the Fall. For example, teasing apart destructive uses of power from the traditional understanding of patriarchal order requires radical reassessment of orthopraxy. For women in the conservative Anabaptist community, it means awakening a passion to participate in making God known to their world through a traditional understanding of the feminine elements of God's image that meaningfully participate in this revelation.

Jewish Writings and Gender Distinction

Shmuel Boteach, rabbi and prolific Jewish writer, expounds on the feminine qualities of the Shekinah, a Jewish understanding of the feminine image of God, and the differences of men and women, which “are far from meaningless and arbitrary.”¹⁰ He argues for the necessity of the different gender roles so that “women will maintain their mystery” and “for them to show the way for men to realize a higher spirituality.”¹¹

¹⁰ Shmuel Boteach, *Judaism for Everyone: Renewing Your Life through the Vibrant Lessons of Jewish Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 175.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 176.

Boteach acknowledges that feminine spirituality is more private, though, he says, it should not be misconstrued as secondary. He asserts that women “can find God at home,” while “a man does not immediately see God’s light . . . he must immerse himself in an environment where even he experiences the presence of God.”¹² These statements about Jewish women are significant to conservative Anabaptist women as well, who likewise hold a more private role in the community.

A feminist Jewish writer, Rita Gross, explores many of the same themes around the Shekinah and feminine engendered terms for God. While she acknowledges the concept of the feminine Shekinah, and embraces the use of feminine pronouns to address God, she critiques the “God-He,” the masculine pronouns to “express a profound and longstanding alienation between women or femaleness and the central values of Jewish religious tradition.”¹³ She further writes, “The social destructiveness of the exclusively masculine style of religious expression . . . is of more concern to me than its theological inadequacies.”¹⁴

For Gross, although Jewish theology understands the feminine aspect of God through the image of the Shekinah, the dominant use of God-He pronouns creates alienation for her between women and Jewish tradition. She posits that the more hidden elements of God’s glory as understood by the Shekinah construct has been damaging to the woman and her role in the Jewish community. Gross appears to miss the Creator’s

¹² Ibid., 183.

¹³ Rita M. Gross, “Steps Toward Feminine Imagery of Deity in Jewish Theology,” *Judaism, Religion and Philosophy Collection* 30, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 185. EBSCOhost.

¹⁴ Ibid., 188.

design of both genders together rendering a more balanced and completed view of the image of God which humankind bears.

Requiring only a feminine understanding of God's image is equally as damaging as a masculine-only view of God. Built on this premise, this understanding of the feminine aspects of God does not obliterate the masculine, but works to bring harmony and wholeness to our personal gender identity.

This study sets out to explore feminine elements of the image of God, which, although subtler than the masculine image of God, bring substance and affirmation to the traditional understanding of the feminine and how women reveal critical aspects of who God is and how God interacts with His people.

Biblical Images of the Shekinah and the Feminine

While the term Shekinah is not used in the Old Testament scriptures, this term is commonly used by Biblical scholars to describe specific aspects of the glory of God's presence with the children of Israel. One primary example of the Shekinah presence was in the innermost chamber of the tabernacle constructed by Moses and, later, the temple built by Solomon. The Shekinah dwelt in the innermost chamber of these places of worship, known as the Holy of Holies, hovering over the mercy seat which covered the Ark of the Testament containing precious items of memorial.

Another image of the Shekinah was God's presence that led Israel through the wilderness for forty years. This presence was manifested in the glory cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night that led the children of Israel through the wilderness.

The Shekinah Glory and the Feminine

The Jewish mystical writers have introduced and provided commentary on how the Shekinah image of the glory of God reveals the feminine aspect of God's image and glory. This can be especially helpful to women in traditional settings that are struggling to find a sense of personal identity. Embracing these traditional qualities requires living into sacrificial surrender, which is neither trendy nor easily honored by our basic human nature.

The ambivalence for women living in traditional communities deepens where traditional roles for women are minimized and considered demeaning. The Jewish concept of the Shekinah bearing the feminine elements of God brings substance to our discussion of femininity for traditional conservative Anabaptist women.

The concept of the Shekinah reflecting the feminine qualities of the image of God brings intrigue and insight to my work as a counselor with women from the conservative Anabaptist community. The Jewish understanding of the feminine qualities of the Shekinah invites one to explore how women uniquely reveal something of the nature and glory of God. This insight sharpens and validates the traditional values held for the feminine within the community, providing a framework from which to encourage and motivate women to emotional health.

Even more significant, though, the feminine quality of the Shekinah motif reveals a primal aspect of the Creator's design: how God reveals significant parts of God's personhood through the lives of women. Aspects of the traditional understanding of femininity, when viewed through this construct, grounded in the very image of God,

establish a core sense of identity and significance for women. Embracing this creative design, one can see crucial elements of the Creator's revelation of God in us.

Written into our hearts is a mystical knowledge of our creative design in which we have been fashioned by God.¹⁵ For women, one could call this a spiritual intuition, this innate sense of identity, often smothered by a dismissing milieu. Patriarchy and male dominance can so easily challenge this female sense of identity, which at times feels so 'other' to the masculine. The popular feminist movement, with its focus on gender equality, often challenges the traditional sense of unique feminine qualities. Embracing how the feminine reflects aspects of the glory of God renews a more complete view of God for a woman in a traditional Anabaptist community. Next, several images of the Shekinah in the biblical texts will ground and enhance further exploration the Jewish concept of the feminine Shekinah.

The Shekinah Glory in the Old Testament

The portable Tabernacle, and later, the magnificent temple that Solomon built for Jehovah God, was the center of worship for Israel. It was the community-gathering place of worship. In the Holy of Holies, the innermost chamber of the tabernacle and temple is where the Shekinah rested.¹⁶ A veil divided the inner chamber of the tabernacle and temple from the inner Holy place. In this innermost Holy of Holies, the Ark of the Covenant stood, which contained several items of remembrance from the Children of Israel's forty-year trek through the wilderness. Over the Ark of the Covenant was the Mercy Seat, overshadowed by sculpted cherubim encircling above. Here, over the Mercy

¹⁵ Romans 1:19.

¹⁶ Exodus 40:34, 2 Chronicles 7:1.

Seat, in the innermost chamber of the tabernacle and temple, the Shekinah dwelt, Jehovah's dwelling place among His people. The High Priest went into the Holy of Holies only one time a year, bringing the required sacrifice of blood for the sins of the people.¹⁷

An aura of sacredness and mystery surrounded the Shekinah in the Holy of Holies. It commanded respect, honor, and a careful reverence. It commanded a certain kind of intrigue and attention as the people waited outside for the High Priest to return during this yearly time of sacrifice for the people. Severe consequences resulted when parameters around the Shekinah were violated.

Eli the High Priest's sons were "worthless men; they did not know the Lord."¹⁸ They refused to follow the commandments of the laws of worship, operating as priests according to their own whims. As a result, everyone in Israel suffered with the disrespect and violation of the inner sanctuary laws. God brought prophetic warnings against Eli and his sons because of their sin. Soon after these prophetic messages, Eli fell to his death when he discovered the enemies of Israel had defeated Israel in war, his sons killed, and the ark of God was taken from Israel. The Shekinah, the glory of God's presence, left the Tabernacle. This very dark time in Israel was called "Ichabod," meaning "The glory has departed from Israel."¹⁹

The discussion of the feminine Shekinah presses beyond simple roles and behaviors to explore ontology, the feminine nature of being through a traditional grid.

¹⁷ Hebrews 9:7.

¹⁸ 1 Samuel 2:12.

¹⁹ 1 Samuel 4 narrates the account of this dark time in Israel.

Next, the biblical feminine Shekinah images lead to finding God as mother to the children of Israel.

The Shekinah as the Mother-Image of God

Through the voice of the prophet Isaiah, God describes ‘herself’ as the one who “formed you [Israel] from the womb,”²⁰ and “now like a woman in labor I will groan, I will both gasp and pant.”²¹ Isaiah goes on record, “The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother He named me . . . He has hidden me in His quiver.”²² The prophet continues to hear the Lord describe ‘Herself’ as mother: “Can a woman forget her nursing child, and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.”²³ Using one of the most powerful of images to describe ‘Her’ nurture and compassion, the Lord likens ‘Herself’ to a nursing mother, where, emotionally and biologically, it is excruciating for her to forget her nursing child.

In Deuteronomy thirty-two, the Shekinah is the mother-God who led Israel through the wilderness.²⁴ This ‘mother’ gives Israel birth (v. 18), and protects Israel and guides them like a mother eagle teaching her young to fly (v. 11). The mother God nursed them on the journey (v.13), feeding them with the richest of fare: milk, meat, and the

²⁰ Isaiah 42:2, 44:24.

²¹ Isaiah 42:14.

²² Isaiah 49:1, 2b. One could ask, why is the mother-God addressed with pronouns of He and Him? A proposed answer to this question points to the gender distinctions, such as biological differences of the gender. The male, outward in nature and the more visible, leads the way, while the female is more reticent, tending to the nurturing and protection of the home. This is supported biologically; primary male sex organs are externally located, while the females are internally located.

²³ Isaiah 49:15.

²⁴ Deuteronomy 32:10-18.

finest of fruit (v.14). Israel grew fat, well developed, like a healthy child with lots of energy (v.15). They forgot their God who birthed and nurtured them.

Ascribing these images as feminine is non-intuitive. Birthing, nursing, and mothering are functions only women are capable of performing. The feminine Shekinah reveals the mother-heart of God, in the shadows or hovering over God's chosen people in the glory cloud, working behind the scenes to nurture, sustain, and protect Israel on their protracted journey through the wilderness, yet the children of Israel still easily dismiss and ignore this Presence.

One could argue that these mother images are only metaphors, descriptions of God's activity among His/Her people. All gender terms ascribed to God are metaphor. While the Scripture uses engendered language to describe God as both male and female, in reality God is neither, while God is both, and incomprehensibly more. Metaphor uses language that offers images commonly known and understood to bring insight into what is difficult to understand. Elucidating the feminine images of God brings to one a deeper and richer understanding of who God is and how He interacts with His children. It also brings credence to how women in traditional Anabaptist settings reveal God's image and glory, offering clues to how these roles and practices for women were established.

A fascinating article, which wrestles with the mixed metaphors of Isaiah forty-nine, notes the description of God in both genders. The image of a birthing mother "highlights YHWH's constant care and compassionate effort to give the oppressed people a new lease on life."²⁵ The same Scripture passage portrays God "as a warrior who

²⁵ Maggie Low, "Isa 49:14-26 – Who Gave Birth To Zion's Children?" *Trinity Theological Journal* 17 (2009): 20–34.

declares war.”²⁶ The author argues, “that the juxtaposed metaphors of mother and warrior for YHWH in this passage highlight the compassion and power of YHWH.”²⁷

“The metaphor of God as mother highlights God’s compassion, but hides God’s sovereignty as a king.”²⁸ ... “The reason we need two metaphors is because there is no one metaphor that will do the job” [of adequately describing who God is to Israel in this passage].

Low’s article explores in depth the use and power of metaphor to help us understand God’s revelation of Himself to His people. It also powerfully reveals and supports our discussion that both genders are needed to reflect effectively the image of God that we bear.

In a patriarchal culture where the masculine presence dominates, the attributes of God’s motherly heart of nurture, compassion, and nourishment easily become lost. When one understands God only as the strong father, the warrior who fights His enemies, or the King who rules with authority, a distorted view reveals God only as an autocratic dictator waiting with a sword to attack defectors. The Mother God images bring the necessary balance of a compassionate heart for relationship. This concept helps us understand some of the weaknesses of the patriarchal system that succumbs to hideous abuses perpetrated upon women. Sequestering women by maintaining ‘safe’ boundaries and silencing the feminine perspective increases the likelihood of abuses in a patriarchal system when men lead by domination only.

²⁶ Ibid., 27.

²⁷ Ibid., 29.

²⁸ Ibid., 28.

When a religious system does not ascribe to the feminine elements of God, it becomes subject to offering a fractured and distorted view of the Gospel. The kingdom of Jesus is about not only right belief, the more masculine focus of rule and order. Jesus' life on earth exemplified the nurturing and nourishing relational elements of His kingdom. While it is true that Jesus, while living on earth, took on masculine form, one could argue that Jesus was the most fully orbed person who ever walked the face of the earth. Jesus revealed the Father in fullness. His pursuit of women in his ministry, His kindness and compassion, His care for children, all give credence to a woman's indispensable participation in bringing to bear the image of the kingdom of God.

Gertrude von le Fort builds her understanding of the 'eternal woman' around the theme of motherhood. She finds Mary the mother of Jesus to be central to understanding the significance of the mother image. Of Mary's response to the angel, "Behold the bond slave of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word,"²⁹ this author writes, "The mystery of the Redemption . . . is predicated on the humble fiat of her answer to the angel . . . the readiness of unconditional surrender."³⁰

This kind of surrender is not only about women. The woman, in her response to the angel, represents to all people the call to surrender. "The Virgin is therefore the revelation of the very essence of religious experience. . . . Mary. . . in her very being . . . reflects the religious nature of mankind which is at the bottom of all worship and in the form of the bridal woman symbolizes the power of surrender of all creation."³¹

²⁹ Luke 1:38.

³⁰ le Forte, 3, 4.

³¹Ibid., 4.

This surrender is not taking a mindless, unchosen course. Mary's surrender comes from a heart convinced of the goodness of Divine intervention in her life coupled with a commitment to accomplish those purposes. The first words we hear her speak as recorded in Scripture are the words noted above, "Be it unto me according to Thy word." The last words, "whatever He says to you, do it,"³² are words spoken as instructions to servants as she enlisted Jesus' help when the supply wine had run out at a wedding.

One author describes surrender like this:

In my search for answers, one of the outcomes I didn't anticipate was that God's vision for his daughters is taking us somewhere. God's vision for us doesn't just reassure us that we matter and that our lives do count for something. God's vision compels us to look beyond ourselves, to ponder a picture of how things were meant to be that leaves us aching for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, and to look for ways to participate in moving the world toward that goal.³³

While there are many different views on how God uses women to accomplish His purposes, the theme of surrender stands central to "his will being done on earth as in heaven." Traditional Anabaptist women can reveal this surrender, using strength and courage to respond to God's call.

Images of the Shekinah glory offer a view of God found 'behind the veil,' or from the mysterious shroud of the glory cloud, bringing insight to the reticent, mysterious elements of the feminine. For feminists like Gross, quoted earlier, this forms a kind of injustice, an inequality that Gross understands as marginalizing to the woman. There is vulnerability in hiddenness, a potential for being missed or abused. This mysterious presence, though powerful, requires focused attention. It invites, but awaits pursuit through the intrigue of its hiddenness, vulnerable to oversight.

³² John 2:5b.

³³ Carolyn Custis James, *Half the Church: Recapturing God's Global Vision for Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 25.

While historically masculine pronouns address God, it need not be assumed that the feminine images of God, such as the Shekinah, are absent or less present. As this study unfolds, the Shekinah presence of God invites us to consider how The Shekinah's hiddenness actually increases its desirability, value, and power when it's true identity is embraced. We will continue to explore the theme of veiled glory, but first, a brief look at the rabbis' view of the Shekinah will enhance our discussion of God's feminine qualities.

The Shekinah Glory and the Rabbis

The term *Shekinah* is a term employed by rabbinic writings as “a name for God.”³⁴ This name was used “only in contexts having to do with God's nearness... “In mystical experience, it is God's nearness that is experienced.” Mystical experience refers to the experiential immanence of God's presence. “*Shekinah* is therefore often the name for God in statements reflecting normal mystical experience.”³⁵ “According to the rabbis, God manifested Himself either to man's sight or to some other human sense. . . telling of God's revelations of Himself to man's senses.”³⁶

Seder Eliahu notes another rabbinical reference to the Shekinah, “The figure that Israel is gathered, when worthy, ‘under the wings of the *Shekinah*.’ This reflects another normal mystical experience, that of *Kedushah*, holiness. It is a figure used primarily with proselytes . . . characterized as having been brought ‘under the wings of the *Shekinah*.’”³⁷

³⁴ Max Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind* (New York: Blaisdell Pub., 1965), 223.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 226, 227.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 228.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

This discussion brings to mind for Christian believers the account where Jesus was weeping over Jerusalem. “Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.”³⁸

Controversy for the Rabbis around the concept of the *Shekinah*, especially in medieval times, centered on “an aversion to anthropomorphism,”³⁹ that of ascribing human characteristics to God. The issue of anthropomorphism addresses an important concept to consider for the discussion of the feminine and the masculine images ascribed to God. We are, as the Scripture states, made in God’s image; we are male or female. Yet one cannot confine God to either gender, masculine or feminine. He is both, yet He is immeasurably beyond any gender rendering. These attributes threaded through both testaments of the Scriptures are metaphors that God has given us in the Scriptures to enlarge our understanding of Him. Gender is one of the vehicles through which God makes Himself known to us.

The rabbinic writings give examples of this understanding of the *Shekinah* presence to show God’s nearness to them. The rabbis speak of the *Shekinah* in this sense. It is the immanent presence of God always around us.

Quoting Mekilta, the prevailing concept in rabbinic writing was “the awareness of God’s love and compassion . . . the basis of the idea that *Shekinah* shares, as it were, the affliction of the community and even the individual. . . . “In all their (Israel’s) affliction He (God) was afflicted.” Kadushin continues, “Whenever Israel is enslaved, *Shekinah*, as it

³⁸ Matthew 23:37.

³⁹ Kadushin, 225.

were, is enslaved with them... when they went into the Wilderness, *Shekinah* was with them, as it says, ‘And the Lord went before them by day.’”⁴⁰

Although the rabbis did not ascribe feminine or masculine qualities to God, feminine themes surround the rabbinical writings describing the *Shekinah*. Our discussion turns now to the Jewish mystical writings where the *Shekinah* feminine attributes of God are defined more clearly.

The Shekinah Glory in Jewish Mysticism

Some of the mystical body of Jewish writings expound on the rabbinic texts, focusing on an experiential knowledge of God. “They reflect . . . on the intricate process by which divine life moves from concealment to disclosure—a process that, in the first place, occurs entirely within God.”⁴¹

Writer and researcher, Everett Ferguson, in *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* prefaces his exploration of Christianity by noting the roots of Christianity in the Jewish Scriptures. He writes, “I consider Judaism the principal context of early Christianity.”⁴² By highlighting the overlay between Jewish and Christian roots, these historical writers offer foundational support and credence for our comparison study of the feminine elements of the *Shekinah* and the conservative Anabaptist view of traditional femininity. “Not only is God Father, King, Judge, and Shepherd. God is also revealed through and

⁴⁰ Ibid., 223. Quoting Isaiah 63:10 and Exodus 13:21, the rabbis show how the *Shekinah*, the nearness of God, was with Israel in all her journey.

⁴¹ Barry W. Holtz, *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts* (New York: Summit Books, 1984), 319.

⁴² Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), xvii.

signified by women . . . the processes within the life of God are paradigmatically expressed in and through the male-female relationship.”⁴³

This work instructs us in the importance of images of both genders to understand effectively the revelation of God expressed through the Scriptures. It is in no way attempting to elicit other gods, such as the queen of heaven that Jeremiah addresses when Israel had fallen into idol worship, sacrificing and pouring out libations to ‘the queen of heaven,’ a heathen false god.⁴⁴ Many distortions of biblical truth have led to the idolatry of false feminine deities which are not the focus of this work. Many distortions of biblical truth have led to the idolatry of false feminine deities which are not the focus of this work. Heathen gods were false gods, not elements of the Creator God of the Scriptures.

This study, therefore, seeks to extrapolate the feminine images of God that are certainly present, albeit more subtly present, in the Scriptures. To reject the feminine images found in Scripture would lead to a significant loss in our understanding of who God is and how God has made Himself/Herself known.

We will now turn our attention to a feminine image of God that comes to us in poetic form. Proverbs eight brings a compelling consideration to our discussion, offering further images to aid our understanding.

The Lady Wisdom of Proverbs Eight

The entity described as Lady Wisdom, or, for some, Woman Wisdom, in Proverbs eight has challenged and mystified theologians over the years. While Solomon is widely

⁴³ Holtz, 338.

⁴⁴ Jeremiah 44:17.

considered the writer of this poem, who this woman is, described and addressed in feminine terms, remains a theological debate.

Theologians wrestle with how to interpret the feminine aspect of Lady Wisdom. Is she “the beloved child,”⁴⁵ created by God before the creation of the world? She could also be an Old Testament reference to Jesus Christ, an early Christological relevance.⁴⁶ The Torah is another possibility that some Jewish writers consider, but early Christians would give their own answer to the question of where wisdom is found, as Jesus is portrayed as the word/wisdom “in the beginning” (John 1:1).⁴⁷

The feminine element of this personification, though, cannot easily be ignored. Theologian Michael Fox notes, “First of all, Wisdom is portrayed as a woman, and whatever the degree of the distinctively female in the portrayal, her femaleness is now a fact which the readers cannot escape.”⁴⁸

Fox goes on to ponder the femininity of this personification and how it brings substance to the Proverb poet’s teaching on wisdom. He writes:

Lady Wisdom is not a king figure. She is powerful, and she is the principle of dominion, but she does not herself exercise rulership. Instead others rule *by* her. Her influence is verbal, working through persuasion and appeal to affection, not through exercise of office and power. Her power and appeal come from the just workings of the universe and the good sense of individual minds rather than from the constraints and compulsions of political institutions.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Leo G. Perdue, *Proverbs* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2000), 143.

⁴⁶ Daniel J. Treier, *Proverbs & Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2011), 51.

⁴⁷ Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 97.

⁴⁸ Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 339.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 340-341.

Fox goes on to grapple with how a male personification in this poetry would impact the understanding of wisdom. A male personification would “make his authority institutional, a derivative of social and political relationships. A male with Lady Wisdom’s qualities would be too much like a monarch.”⁵⁰

Many theologians, though, struggle to find attributes of women in the speaking figure of Proverbs eight. Although Phillips cannot be sure which of the various members of the godhead are described in Proverbs eight, he concedes that the passage is one of “great majesty and mystery.”⁵¹

It is interesting to note that with ease the seductress woman of Proverbs, Chapter Seven and Lady Folly of Proverbs Nine are quickly and skillfully described as women. Certainly, human women are capable of great manipulation and damage to both themselves and their counterparts. We will find that no human woman will, in and of herself, successfully live up to Lady Wisdom’s description. It also follows that a traditional patriarchal understanding calls men to lead, and yet no human man can reveal, from his own resources, a flawless image of creator, king, warrior, or priest.

Phillips describes the downward spiral of a man caught in the trap of the seductress described in Proverbs Seven:

The same subtle serpent who seduced Eve taught this woman her wiles. The downward steps in that first temptation were swift—“[Eve] saw. . . she took. . . and did eat. . . and gave.” (Genesis 3:6). The serpent kept Eve’s gaze riveted on the forbidden fruit so that the look might become a lust. . . [C]hoice led to a chain reaction. . . Eve the sinner became a seducer. The deadly virus was passed on.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid., 340.

⁵¹ Ibid., 197.

⁵² John Phillips, *Exploring Proverbs, Vol. 1, Proverbs 1:1-19:5* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux, 1995), 171.

Likewise, Philips describes the Foolish Woman of Proverbs Nine.

A foolish woman is clamorous: she is simple, and knoweth nothing. She may have a pretty face, but she has an empty head. She may have physical appeal, but that is all she has. Any man forced to live with her would soon become bored with her. Her interests run to clothes and cosmetics, to fashion magazines and gossip columns, to trash and trivia.⁵³

The chiasmic formation of Proverbs Seven through Nine yields insight into the emphasis of the poet to the feminine principle established at the beginning of time. The center of a chiasm delineates where emphasis is being placed.

David Dorsey, literary professor of the Old Testament, notes that “in a symmetrical scheme . . . the center is normally the natural position of prominence,” as is true in other places such as symmetrical art.⁵⁴ “Chiasmic structures frequently have a unique center item . . . The uniqueness of this location makes it suitable for emphasizing whatever is placed there.”⁵⁵ Dorsey notes that the symmetrical chiasmic structure of Proverbs Seven through Nine emphasizes Lady Wisdom to the reader, her call, her appeal, and her participation with the Creator.⁵⁶

From this understanding of the chiasmic arrangement of this poetry, it appears that one can safely posit that the poet of Proverbs eight is comparing and contrasting Lady Wisdom to the Seductress and the Foolish Woman of Proverbs seven and nine, respectively. Exploring who Lady Wisdom is and what she brings to bear to her world promises to provide an opportunity for insight into images and motifs that hold a

⁵³ Ibid., 223.

⁵⁴ David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 40.

⁵⁵ Ibid. As quoted from: H. Van Dyke Parunak, “Oral Typesetting: Some Uses of Biblical Structure.” *Biblica* 62 (1981): 153-68.

⁵⁶ Dorsey, 189.

timeless, traditional view of the feminine image of God that women ascribing to a traditional view of Scripture are called to embrace.

Four significant themes in Proverbs Eight bring substance to our discussion of biblical feminine images of God. Verses one through eleven speak of Lady Wisdom's voice and call to 'men.' Verses twelve through twenty-one speak of Lady Wisdom's impact, while verses twenty-two through thirty-one reveal her origins, bringing insight into the synergy between this feminine entity and the Creator. Finally, through a literary device, Lady Wisdom is shown as the feminine counterpart to the Creator, carrying the motif of "wife," that brings life and shalom.

Proverbs 8:1-11, The Voice of Wisdom

¹ Does not wisdom call,
 And understanding lift up her voice?
² On top of the heights beside the way,
 Where the paths meet, she takes her stand;
³ Beside the gates, at the opening to the city,
 At the entrance of the doors, she cries out:
⁴ "To you, O men, I call,
 And my voice is to the sons of men.
⁵ "O naive ones, understand prudence;
 And, O fools, understand wisdom.
 "Listen, for I will speak noble things;
 And the opening of my lips *will reveal* right things.
⁷ "For my mouth will utter truth;
 And wickedness is an abomination to my lips.
⁸ "All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness;
 There is nothing crooked or perverted in them.
⁹ "They are all straightforward to him who understands,
 And right to those who find knowledge.
¹⁰ "Take my instruction and not silver,
 And knowledge rather than choicest gold.
¹¹ "For wisdom is better than jewels;
 And all desirable things cannot compare with her.

The poem begins by ascertaining Lady Wisdom's voice. She is speaking, she is crying out. This is not from a lectern or a pulpit, but "in the streets, in the market square, in the bustling opening of the city gates, in the midst of urban life... she shouts with joy, she lifts up her voice, she calls, by her spoken word, trying to catch the attention of everyone in town."⁵⁷ Lady Wisdom calls out to men, affirming the value of her offerings with a confident voice.

This feminine counterpart of the Creator is everywhere present, but not from high and lofty places of authority. "Lady Wisdom cries out but does not kiss the young man impudently. She desires to persuade with the truthful content of her speech."⁵⁸ The basis for this initial aspect of the appeal concerns the truth of her words: they do not merely convey mental knowledge, but more profoundly are righteous, straightforward rather than devious and deceptive."⁵⁹

Lady Wisdom knows that she has a message needing to be heard, and that it holds significant value. Her voice, what she brings to bear to her world, carries value more than material riches; therefore, the pursuit of this truthful and intuitive voice are more valuable than great riches.

While this Scripture discloses an understanding of the wisdom of God, enmeshed in the fabric of the text are attributes, not simply mental knowledge, but of an intuitive knowing which often bears a quality of wisdom attributed to the feminine.

⁵⁷ Kathleen M. O'Connor, *The Wisdom Literature* (Wilmington: M. Glazier, 1988), 70.

⁵⁸ Daniel J. Treier, *Proverbs & Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2011), 8.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*; Proverbs 8:6-9.

Proverbs 8: 12-21 The Origins of Lady Wisdom

¹² “I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,
 And I find knowledge *and* discretion.
¹³ “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil;
 Pride and arrogance and the evil way
 And the perverted mouth, I hate.
¹⁴ “Counsel is mine and sound wisdom;
 I am understanding, power is mine.
¹⁵ “By me kings reign,
 And rulers decree justice.
¹⁶ “By me princes rule, and nobles,
 All who judge rightly.
¹⁷ “I love those who love me;
 And those who diligently seek me will find me.
¹⁸ “Riches and honor are with me,
 Enduring wealth and righteousness.
¹⁹ “My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold,
 And my yield *better* than choicest silver.
²⁰ “I walk in the way of righteousness,
 In the midst of the paths of justice,
²¹ To endow those who love me with wealth,
 That I may fill their treasuries.

As noted in our introduction to this discussion, this passage does not depict Lady Wisdom as a ruler. Lady Wisdom, though, is confident of her role and importance in rulership. Her presence and influence are essential for the ‘king’ to be successful. Not only wealth and riches are a result of her participation, but righteousness and justice are also a result of her presence and interaction.⁶⁰ This leaves the reader with no question of the role she is claiming to play in the leadership of dignitaries.

“Pride, arrogance, and the evil way” are implied results of refusing the counsel of Lady Wisdom. She acknowledges the power she holds through her understanding as absolute necessities for princes, kings, and judges to lead and “judge rightly.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ Proverbs 8:18.

⁶¹ Proverbs 8:16.

It is significant to note that Lady Wisdom “calls” and brings her voice, but one must pursue her to find her. While she is easily found in the crossways of life, she does not exert demands or force to be heard, but requires one to “diligently seek” her to find the wisdom she brings.⁶²

These strong proclamations from Lady Wisdom lead one to ask about her credentials that justify such claims. The poem now moves to the veracity of her claims that we find grounded in her origins.

Proverbs 8:22-31 Lady Wisdom, Participant in Creation

²² “The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way,
Before His works of old.

²³ “From everlasting I was established,
From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth.

²⁴ “When there were no depths I was brought forth,
When there were no springs abounding with water.

²⁵ “Before the mountains were settled,
Before the hills I was brought forth;

²⁶ While He had not yet made the earth and the fields,
Nor the first dust of the world.

²⁷ “When He established the heavens, I was there,
When He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep,

²⁸ When He made firm the skies above,
When the springs of the deep became fixed,

²⁹ When He set for the sea its boundary
So that the water would not transgress His command,
When He marked out the foundations of the earth;

³⁰ Then I was beside Him, *as* a master workman;
And I was daily *His* delight,
Rejoicing always before Him,

³¹ Rejoicing in the world, His earth,
And *having* my delight in the sons of men

⁶² Proverbs 8:17.

“I was there,” “I was beside Him,” Lady Wisdom declares of her place at the side of the Creator at the Creation of the world.⁶³ This feminine entity was “brought forth” before the beginning of time. Theologians struggle to understand how this genesis came to be.

Writer Kathleen M. O’Conner makes these deductions of Lady Wisdom.

It is these origins before the birth of the world which establish the Wisdom Woman’s authority. In the ancient world, the older the religious figures and traditions were believed to be, the more claim they had to reveal hidden truths. She is older than even the oldest thing we know, the earth itself. By placing her birth before creation, the author gives her unquestionable authority to speak the truth. This Wisdom Woman is an ancient power to be reckoned with.⁶⁴

Lady Wisdom reveals her origins as being before the creation, before the beginning of time. She was there, observing the Creator doing his work of bringing the earth into being. This claim substantiates her knowledge of how things have come to be and how they work. “Wisdom makes clear that God originated their association. She describes God as the subject who acts and herself as the one acted upon, but leaves mysterious exactly *how* God initiated their relationship.”⁶⁵

An image that few commentators name, but that could be considered to be intimated through references to the Creation in this discussion is the concept of the “rib.” Blending the elements of creation as the passage does with gender-sensitive structure while pondering the establishment of gender concepts around the Biblical creation account could bring to one’s mind images of Eve’s creation.

⁶³ Proverbs 8:27, 30.

⁶⁴ O’Connor, 66.

⁶⁵ Christine Elizabeth Yoder, *Proverbs* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), 94.

This passage reveals the feminine engendered Wisdom coming into being before Yahweh moves to create the world in which we live. While the text is not clear as to Wisdom's role at creation, what is clearly stated is the mutuality of delight between Lady Wisdom and Yahweh.

This feminine companion or counterpart was there at the Creation, observing all that the Creator is doing. "In this poem the Wisdom Woman does not act alone. She is not God, but God's companion. . . . This poem depicts a puzzling mutuality in her relationship with God. She is ever with him, joining in his work, imprinting it with her artistry, and living with God in mutual delight."⁶⁶

The translation of the Hebrew word, *'amon*, "(I was at God's side) . . . locates her with respect to God . . . but leaves her exact role, like her origins, obscure."⁶⁷ Numerous suggestions abound. For some, "architect" or "artist" lends credence, while for others "infant" or "darling child" is considered.⁶⁸ "Confidant and "counselor" are considered based on similar-sounding words in languages closely related to Hebrew."⁶⁹

Theologian Delitzsch sees the Hebrew word designating the meaning of "artistic performances of a[n] artificer" as describing what the Creator intended for Lady Wisdom.

This self-designation . . . is here very suitable; for after she has said that she was brought forth by God before the world was, and that she was present when it was created, the [Hebrew word] now answers the question as to what God had in view when He gave Wisdom her separate existence . . . and in what capacity: . . . [I]t was

⁶⁶ O'Conner, 67.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 96. To read several of the multiple discussions of the considerations of the Hebrew word meanings, refer to this author, as well as: Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs: A Commentary*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 99-101; Kathleen Anne Farmer, *Who Knows What Is Good? A Commentary on the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 52-56.

⁶⁸ Farmer, 55.

⁶⁹ William McKane, *Proverbs, a New Approach* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 357-58.

she who transferred the creative thoughts originally existing... and set in motion by His Creative order, from their ideal into their real effectiveness... artistically carry[ing] out the delineations,... the mediating cause,... the demiurgic power which the divine creative activity made use of.⁷⁰

Again, a chiastic arrangement of the poem adds insight into the relationship that Lady Wisdom brings to the Creator through the delight and rejoicing that characterize the last verses of this section. Wisdom was daily His delight, rejoicing before Him, rejoicing in the world, taking delight in the sons of men. “Wisdom enjoys being with God and her position of honor. Her joy is especially intense as she watches God create.”⁷¹

Theologian Wardlaw states it like this: “Wisdom was the constant companion or associate of all God’s plans and all their execution,—inseparable from God in all he purposed and in all he did; and “was daily his delight.”⁷² He goes on to describe this synergy between the Creator and Lady Wisdom:

As the products of divine power and wisdom successively appeared on each of these days, the almighty and all-wise Creator delighted in the manifestation of his own perfections. ... Wisdom, by her counsels, when carried into execution, advances the glory of God ... there being nothing in the results of her counsels of which she has any reason to be ashamed.⁷³

The power of feminine affirmation rings loudly through this poetry. It resounds of heavenly scenes found in Revelation where the joy of heaven surrounds the throne of God. This touch of heaven shadows the creation of the world, the synergy and harmony of these divine companions calling to those in God’s creation to participate.

⁷⁰ Franz Delitzsch and M. G. Easton. *Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon*. Vol. I. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1950), 191.

⁷¹ Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs: A Commentary*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 97.

⁷² Ralph Wardlaw, *Lectures on the Book of Proverbs* (Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock, 1981), 203.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 203, 204.

Harmonious relationship characterizes the divine interplay of the Creator and Lady Wisdom.⁷⁴ This picture of harmony ignites a sense of shalom as this feminine counterpart interacts, affirms, and delights in the Creator and His work.

The theme of harmonious delight and celebration with engendered themes is threaded through the Scriptures. King David's prayer worships Yahweh as he envisions Israel, His bride, redeemed and taking her place in the temple that David's son would build.⁷⁵ King Solomon reenacts this scene of worship at the dedication of the temple.⁷⁶ Prophetically, the prophet Isaiah sees Israel as the radiant bride with a gloriously beautiful crown, "married" to her bridegroom, a scene filled with utter delight.⁷⁷

The final act of Scripture repeats this theme of a beautiful bride, prepared and pursued by her bridegroom, "new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband."⁷⁸ We find the images of engendered, harmonious delight throughout Scripture, forming a central theme. Can we support the image of wife for Lady Wisdom from our study of Proverbs eight? The last section of the proverb leads us to that image.

Proverbs 8:32-36 The Image of a Wife

³² "Now therefore, *O* sons, listen to me,
For blessed are they who keep my ways.
³³ "Heed instruction and be wise,
And do not neglect *it*."

⁷⁴ Proverbs 8:30b, 31.

⁷⁵ 2 Samuel 7: 22-29.

⁷⁶ I Kings 8:33-43.

⁷⁷ Isaiah 62: 1-5.

⁷⁸ Revelation 21:2.

³⁴ “Blessed is the man who listens to me,
 Watching daily at my gates,
 Waiting at my doorposts.
³⁵ “For he who finds me finds life
 And obtains favor from the LORD.
³⁶ “But he who sins against me injures himself;
 All those who hate me love death.”

The final section of the poem of Proverbs eight confirms an allusion to Lady Wisdom’s identity as the feminine aspect of Yahweh’s image through the repetition of a poetic motif. “He who finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord,” immediately draws one’s mind to an identical statement in Proverbs eighteen. “He who finds ‘me,’ Lady Wisdom declares, finds life, equating herself to the ‘wife’ a good man finds in the later chapter.”⁷⁹ Donald Treier intertwines the wisdom themes of the chapter with the metaphor of wife.

We should not simply listen to Wisdom by studying, but more holistically pursue her via personal relationship; study must therefore be prayerful, pursuing covenant fellowship with God.

The metaphorical—and literal—importance of marriage registers in a parallel between 8:35 and 18:22. In the former, finding Wisdom obtains “favor from the Lord;” in the latter, finding a good wife does so. The relational context of pursuing Wisdom is frequent and consistent.⁸⁰

One’s mind is also drawn to the Genesis passage where the Lord God declares: “It is not good for the man to be alone.”⁸¹ Both of these passages affirm the necessity of the feminine voice of discernment and wisdom that needs to be “listened to.” In the man’s

⁷⁹ Proverbs 18:35.

⁸⁰ Treier, 9.

⁸¹ Genesis 2:18a.

daily life, in his dwelling, this feminine voice brings life as it is heard. It is not optional, but essential for there to be favor and life.⁸²

Lady Wisdom and the Traditional Feminine

Juxtaposed between the Seductress of Proverbs seven and Lady Folly of Proverbs nine we find the feminine entity Lady Wisdom of Proverbs eight, the counterpart/co-creator with the Creator as He forms the world, mystifying theologians while calling to men to hear her critical message. Significant themes from this passage can be summarized to bring insight to women living in conservative Anabaptist communities, bringing fabric and significance to the traditional stance held for women in this community. The final verses in the chapter reveal the theme of a wife and how this feminine entity brings “life” and “favor from the Lord” when she is sought and found. This summary allows one to unpack the role of this feminine entity of the Creator, bringing a fuller view of the role the traditional feminine plays in her relationships. The themes of voice, pursuit, mystery, and creativity with playful delight enrich relationships and bring shalom to the world.

Voice

Having voice, distinctly feminine voice, is a critical element that the traditional feminine requires. Although Lady Wisdom does not speak from a lectern or pulpit, it does not weaken or disqualify the message she brings to her world. Rabbi Shmuel Boteach merges the theme of the Shekinah, understood as the feminine aspect of God’s image, and voice in this way:

⁸² 1 Peter 3:7. The apostle Peter writes instructions reminiscent of these Biblical mandates. He instructs husbands to “grant [their wives] honor” as a fellow heir of the grace of life so that [their] prayers may not be hindered

We must not misconstrue woman's more private role within Judaism as secondary. Those who have spiritual fulfillment do not need to shout it from the pulpits of the synagogues any more than those who are truly in love need to demonstrate it in public places. Subtle dignity and quiet spirituality are far more formidable than anything overtly aggressive or physical. True religious piety and holiness do not holler. They speak in a strong and steady voice, resonating from within.⁸³

Dana Crowley Jack addresses the importance of feminine voice, and how the loss of one's voice leads to depression in women. Her findings echo the themes from Proverbs eight.. "Voice is an indicator of self. Speaking one's feelings and thoughts is part of creating, maintaining, and recreating one's authentic self."⁸⁴

Based on her experience of working with depressed women, Jack names three elements of loss, which affects the feminine soul.

First, as the women present it, the loss of self coincides with a loss of voice in relationship. ... Second, we notice women lose themselves as they try to fit into an image provided by someone else—husband, parental teachings, the culture. ... Third, in their narratives, the women indicate that they refrain from speech not only to avoid conflict but because they fear they may be wrong.⁸⁵

Lady Wisdom, the feminine entity of the Creator in Proverbs eight, addresses these issues of voice while embracing a traditional position of the feminine. The voice of Lady Wisdom is confident of her offerings: declaring, affirming, and blending with the Creator, creating a synergistic harmony. This distinct, although mysterious voice is steady and courageous, confident of what she brings to bear in her world.

In our earlier fictitious vignette, Anna faced the dilemma of feeling as if she had no voice in her marriage during relational turmoil in the church that greatly affected both

⁸³ Shmuel Boteach, *Judaism for Everyone: Renewing Your Life through the Vibrant Lessons of Jewish Faith* (New York: Basic Books), 183.

⁸⁴ Dana Crowley Jack, *Silencing the Self: Women and Depression* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 32.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 32, 33.

she and her husband. Anna's husband dismissed any value that she could offer him in the time of stress. This dismissal greatly affected both of their emotional health. Not only could Anna have had opportunity to bring a discerning presence, but her husband also could have benefited from receiving her listening ear and caring heart.

Anna faces the challenge of finding and embracing her heart's voice, even in the face of a dismissing presence. She may claim it with internal confidence, even when it is not wise to express it audibly.

Pursuit

This feminine counterpart of the Creator, while confident and courageous, requires pursuit in order to be found. While the poetic passage of Proverbs eight begins with the confident voice of Wisdom crying out, the reader is repeatedly instructed that she must be pursued.⁸⁶ Traditional relationships deem it proper for men to pursue women, especially emphasized in dating relationships and in proposal for marriage. Pursuit is also important in marriage. Male leadership with a servant heart seeks to blend both voices. True masculine servant leadership desires and seeks to hear the feminine voice.

This call for pursuit in no way commentates on the veracity of this feminine voice of wisdom. Her poise and confidence are not dependent upon pursuit, but are required for those who know the need of her relationship (as well as for those who do not know their need!).

⁸⁶ Proverbs 8:17, 35.

Mystery

A common theme related to Lady Wisdom and to the traditional feminine is the mystery that surrounds women. A brief google search yields many quotes revealing this theme. Grace Kelly is noted as saying, “Emancipation of women has made them lose their mystery.”⁸⁷ Another contemporary note on women and mystery by Keanu Reeves: “It's always wonderful to get to know women, with the mystery and the joy and the depth. If you can make a woman laugh, you're seeing the most beautiful thing on God's Earth.”⁸⁸ Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel is quoted as saying, “Mysteries are feminine; they like to veil themselves but still want to be seen and divined.”⁸⁹

Shmuel Boteach commentates on the mystery of women in his discussion of feminine images of God. “Curiosity and the constant desire to explore the other gender is essential to attraction... the female nature points to a ‘feminine mystique’ in which a woman becomes ultimately unknowable to a man, thereby guaranteeing the male’s eternal pursuit of the female.”⁹⁰

It is interesting to note how these quotes support commonly held beliefs about the feminine that resonate with the Lady Wisdom of Proverbs eight. As we grapple with our discussion of the feminine images of God, a metaphor of ‘veiled glory’ continues to emerge, bringing more shape to our understanding of how the traditional feminine reveals these feminine images of God.

⁸⁷ Brainy quotes, accessed May 16, 2014, <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/g/gracekelly274307.html#BxocC2sAPJ8HBldK.99>

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Boteach, 178.

Creativity

Lady Wisdom participates in the creative work of the Creator. While she delights in what the Creator is doing, she also describes herself as a “master workman,” participating in the creation scene.

Drawing from the Shekinah themes we have considered, there is a sense of Lady Wisdom bringing creative beauty to her world. One finds a divine partnership between Lady Wisdom and the Creator as they co-create in the world in which we live. The theme of playfulness is one that many theologians see in this passage. The utter delight of working in harmony brings vivaciousness and laughter to life.

Dan Allender, a Christian psychologist who does extensive work with abuse victims, describes playfulness as a category for what women bring to relationship, noting the evidence of healing it reveals in one’s personal presence. He describes the healing journey of “Katrina.” As her heart healed and her hope grew, “the larger her soul became for her husband. She tenderly, boldly, wildly, wisely surrounded him with love while allowing him to depart when he got too scared.”⁹¹

This scene wonderfully describes the creativity women bring to relationship as they embrace their feminine hearts. Even in the face of difficulty, as women embrace this playful, creative side of God’s image, they bring joy and delight to their world.

Allender further describes shalom that comes from the harmony relationship brings. “Shalom is a peace that not only recalls all the pieces of one’s life but sees how

⁹¹ Dan B. Allender, *The Healing Path: How the Hurts in Your Past Can Lead You to a More Abundant Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 1999), 45.

the parts fit together in a unified and glorious whole. Shalom involves rest and gratitude; it provides a momentary balance and harmony where all things seem right.”⁹²

This synergy and harmony that Lady Wisdom brings to her relationship with the Creator enlivens our understanding of traditional femininity. Winsome delight invites the ‘other’ to a fluid dance of relational pleasure.

The Shekinah as Veiled Glory

The Shekinah glory, as we are discovering, is the presence of the glory of God which surrounds and nurtures Israel throughout Old Testament writings. One can notice that while Its presence is powerful, requiring respect and boundaries, It is more shrouded and behind the scenes. As Rabbi Boteach points out, the feminine qualities of the Shekinah and the differences of men and women “are far from meaningless and arbitrary.” He argues for the necessity of the different gender roles so that “women will maintain their mystery.”⁹³ A woman seeks God differently than men, but this should not be “construed as secondary.” As we noted earlier, Rabbi Boteach finds that (Jewish) women are more private in their spiritual pursuits, while “a man must immerse himself in spiritual pursuit, needing regular public meetings for activities of prayers and pursuit of the Scriptures, “environment where even he experiences the presence of God.”⁹⁴

It is the divine interplay of the Creator and the feminine counterpart of Lady Wisdom that offers us an understanding of the wholesomeness of the Creator’s intent of

⁹² Ibid., 123.

⁹³ Boteach, 183.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

harmonious relationship between the genders. The differences in how the genders engage God's presence only enhance the experience of God when blended to create wholeness.

Veiled Glory: A Working Metaphor for Biblical Femininity Through a Conservative Anabaptist Lens

One could propose that a working metaphor for the feminine Shekinah is the phrase "veiled glory." The tension in these paired words; veiled, shrouded or subdued in the back ground, with glory, exquisite beauty and light, helps one's mind to encompass the reality experienced through the feminine Shekinah.

As noted earlier, one primary image of the Shekinah was found behind the veil in the Holy of Holies, the innermost chamber of the tabernacle and temple. It was in essence "the keeper of God's house." Shekinah images, while present, were more in the background. The description of the Shekinah at Sinai, though hidden, was neither insignificant or without power.

One of the first descriptions of Israel's encounter with the glory of the Shekinah was at Mt. Sinai when Israel was traveling through the wilderness. Though perhaps not veiled in our strict understanding of the word, the Lord gave strict instructions about approaching the mountain, setting boundaries for the priests and the people.⁹⁵ The power of this Presence incited fear because of the "thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking."⁹⁶ While this image of the Shekinah is not distinctly feminine in this context, overlapping themes can be seen, such as parameters which surround one's access to feminine beauty.

⁹⁵ Exodus 19:23.

⁹⁶ Exodus 20:18.

What is the Veil?

In considering ‘veiled glory’ as a metaphor for the traditional feminine, the ‘veil’ is first an issue of the heart—a way of living and presenting oneself to the world by embracing the glory of the image of God in the feminine heart. It is surrendering to the God of the universe who has designed His creation so that it is ‘good.’ It is honoring and respecting elements of the feminine that have been sidelined in reaction to horrible abuses that have been and continue to be perpetrated toward women.

Merging an understanding of the Shekinah motif with the metaphor of “veiled glory” brings substance to the traditional view of the feminine, which brings perspective to how women reveal God’s image and glory. Contrary to being smothering, veiled glory, both internally and externally, reveals something profound about God. Intuitively, we know that there is a mysterious, enticing side of God. It also lends credence to the heart of a woman, often mysterious, enticing those in her world into relationship. It reveals a heart of surrender, bringing to bear a critical element of the glory of God who longs for, and surrenders His best to redeem, His children.

As discussed earlier, the light and glory of God’s presence, the Shekinah, rested in the places of Jewish worship. It was found in the most Holy place of the Tabernacle built under Moses’ instructions in the wilderness,⁹⁷ during Israel’s forty-year journey from Egypt, and later in the Temple built by King Solomon in Jerusalem. The Shekinah glory was found behind the veil that separated the inner chamber, the Holy place, from the most inner chamber called the Holy of Holies. This Presence commanded respect. Strict

⁹⁷ Exodus chapters 35-40 detail the precise instructions from the Lord followed by Israel in constructing the tabernacle, their place of worship, and where the glory cloud of God’s presence rested. Exodus 40:34-38 details how the glory of the Lord surrounded and filled the Tabernacle. 1 Kings 8 documents a very similar scene – God’s glory filling the Temple as Solomon dedicated and worshiped God at the Temple.

guidelines instructed the priests as to when and who could enter this most Holy chamber. The veil hid the power and brightness of God's glory, creating an aura of mystery that surrounded the inner chambers of the Tabernacle and Temple, inviting reverence and respect for the light of God's glory.

Women Wearing Head Veils

For traditional conservative Anabaptist women reading about the concept of the feminine Shekinah glory of God behind the veil, an immediate connection will be made with the practice of women veiling their heads. Does the concept of 'veiled glory' include the practice of women wearing head coverings? For conservative Anabaptist women, the answer is a firm "Yes."⁹⁸ Taken from the Apostle Paul's instructions in First Corinthians eleven, conservative Anabaptists have maintained the literal application of this passage to instruct women to wear a head covering as a symbol of submission to the instruction for "headship order." One could posit that the apostle, thoroughly trained in Hebrew history and law, may have drawn from this concept in writing his instructions to the Corinthian church.

This present study of the femininity of God's image in the Shekinah glory brings depth of understanding to the practice of conservative Anabaptist women wearing veils. The veil can certainly reveal a sign of surrender to the Shekinah image of God that women bear. For many, in more recent decades, it has not been seen in this light.

Anabaptist historian and author Donald Kraybill conducted research around the practice of Anabaptist women wearing veils during a time when the practice was losing

⁹⁸ Daniel Kauffman, *Doctrines of the Bible, a Brief Discussion of the Teachings of God's Word* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Pub. House, 1928), 412, 413.

favor.⁹⁹ Historically, women of all Anabaptist groups practiced veiling their heads. During the season of cultural upheaval in the 1960s and 1970s, among the more “progressive” Anabaptist groups, the practice of women wearing veils fell into disfavor.

Drawing from anthropological research, Kraybill understands the practice of women’s veiling historically in the larger Anabaptist denominations to be “a summarizing symbol” which “operates to integrate and synthesize a complex configuration of ideas.” In other words, the author is stating that the veiling of Anabaptist women contained a deeper, more encompassing meaning than simply the veiling of women. The author describes the veiling of women as a “key symbol,” which “synthesizes the Mennonite cultural ethos and reflects its basic tone, character and worldview . . . a larger system of separatist symbols . . . reflecting the central and deepest meanings of the culture’s belief and values.”¹⁰⁰ There is truth to the notion that women’s veils have become a central icon for the conservative Anabaptist groups.

Kraybill’s findings correlated “veil wearing and sex role perceptions.”¹⁰¹ He posits that his findings “confirm . . . that the veiling serves to justify and explain the subordination of women in Mennonite culture. Those who wear the veiling are much more likely to hold traditional views of male-dominated sex roles . . . directly sanctioning sex roles.”¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Donald B. Kraybill, “Mennonite Woman’s Veiling: The Rise and Fall of A Sacred Symbol,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*: 298-320, accessed May 30, 2014.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 310.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 310.

The study of the Shekinah glory, and how it brings to bear the feminine elements of God's glory, adds dimension to the discussion of the practice of conservative Anabaptist women wearing veilings. While emphasizing the core Creational elements of the feminine and how God wants to make Himself known to the world, the Shekinah motif deemphasizes the cultural implications of the woman's veiling. This study holds that the veiled Shekinah calls women's attention to how they reflect something of significance about God. The practice of the veiling, or head covering, as it is commonly called, becomes a symbol of the representation of God's hidden glory. While conservative Anabaptists "have stressed the literal obedience to commands of the Scriptures" . . . and "the veiling is a symbol, par excellence, that [conservative Anabaptists] actually believe, obeying the Bible [teachings] in a very specific and practical sense,"¹⁰³ the Shekinah motif brings a richer meaning to the practice beyond a cultural expression.

For conservative Anabaptist women to embrace their identity through the image of God's glory opens an opportunity for a new sense of inner freedom. The practice of veiling now becomes an ontological expression of one's identity with the Creator as opposed to a stifling cultural practice, which encourages male domination. This researcher posits that practicing the veiling now takes on a sense of an eternal value, opening a woman's heart to the blessings of God.

Embracing the veiled Shekinah image further enables empowerment of traditional conservative women to make courageous choices in the face of abuse. As a woman

¹⁰³ Ibid., 303.

claims her identity as one bearing significant elements of God's image to the world, she becomes empowered to stand against harmful aggression with grace and dignity.

The First Corinthians Eleven passage substantiates this belief where the apostle writes that a veiled woman has “a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.”¹⁰⁴ This is not to imply some sort of magical intervention, but gives credence to the belief that traditional conservative Anabaptist women who practice the veiling would have opportunity to embrace the divine presence of God's power. This leads us to another element of “veiled glory,” the theme of the mystery that surrounds the feminine.

For conservative Anabaptist women, the practice of veiling is a literal, physical application. Jesus taught, though, that the inner realities of the heart determine the value of one's practice.¹⁰⁵ As we consider the Shekinah motif, how this reveals feminine elements of God's glory, this teaching of Jesus would affirm that “veiled glory” is a deeper issue than placing a physical veil on one's head.

Mirrored Feminine Images of God, Biblical Narratives of Women Revealing “Veiled Glory”

Introduction

As conservative Anabaptists who hold to a literal and inerrant view of Scripture, narratives of women from the Scriptures bring important substance to our discussion of the image of “veiled glory” that conservative Anabaptist women bear. While the times and seasons in which they lived are significantly different from our world today, the timeless creational qualities of the biblical narratives bring insight to our discussion.

¹⁰⁴ 1 Corinthians 11:10 KJV, renders this line: “ought to have power on her head because of the angels.”

¹⁰⁵ Matthew 5:27, 28. Jesus states that anyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.

Numerous accounts in both the Old and New Testaments reveal women of God who mirrored the beauty of God’s feminine image. While these accounts are often shrouded in the background, they deliver significant insight into the movement of God among His people, providing rich colors in the tapestry of biblical accounts. Three accounts from each of the Old and New Testaments will shape our exploration of these feminine images revealed in narrative.

Three Old Testament Narratives

The Mother of Samson, Manoah’s wife, although unnamed throughout the narrative account, brings a significant example of a woman believing with faith in the work of God in her life. The account begins, after the naming of genealogy, to describe an angel appearing to this barren, unnamed woman, to announce that she would conceive and bear a son. Included in the angel’s message was how this child “shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines.”¹⁰⁶ Her son was to be “a Nazirite to God from the womb,” so this woman was to have no “wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing” as she carried and gave birth to this special child. A Nazirite was one commissioned with special prophetic work for the God of Israel. The angel’s instructions for this child were “that no razor shall come upon his head.”

The woman went to report this “appearance of the angel of God, very awesome” to her husband Manoah. Manoah prayed to God that He would send the angel again “that he may teach us what to do for the boy who is to be born.”

Amazingly, however, the angel came again to the woman, when Manoah her husband was not with her. She ran quickly to tell her husband, who in turn “followed his

¹⁰⁶ Judges 13. This chapter contains the entire narrative of the woman’s story. The noted quote, plus all other references to this narrative, are found in this chapter.

wife.” In response to Manoah’s request for information, the angel responded, “let the woman pay attention to all that I said,” recounting again the Nazirite ascetic practices.

The angel declined Manoah’s query of his name and the request to prepare food for their guest, but the angel instructed Manoah rather to prepare a burnt offering to present to the Lord. The angel “performed wonders,” ascending into the flame that went up from the altar toward heaven. Manoah and his wife fell on their faces to the ground.

This barren, nameless woman, commissioned to bear this special child, again brings her faith and belief in God’s promises to bear in the couple’s life. Manoah is convinced, after the angel does not again return, that they will die, “because we have seen God.” His wife responds with wise and insightful words of faith. “If the Lord had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would he have shown us all these things, nor would He have let us hear things like this at this time.”

This woman, soon to become mother to a Judge of Israel, reveals her faith and trust in the God of Israel. Although her identity is veiled by namelessness in the account, the great faith she exhibits impacts the whole nation of Israel. It is curious, during this season of Israel’s history that God sent an angel to the woman instead of to her husband, repeatedly. It is her voice, her body, and her discerning insight that challenges us to trust the God of Israel.

Abigail the Carmelite, married to a rich man, Nabal, is described as a woman “intelligent and beautiful in appearance.”¹⁰⁷ Conversely, her husband Nabal is described as a Calebite who was “harsh and evil in his dealings.” The setting for the account is

¹⁰⁷ 1 Samuel 25:1-38 is the passage of this narrative account of Abigail.

during the time when David, who had been anointed by the Prophet Samuel when he was yet a lad to be the next king of Israel,¹⁰⁸ is fleeing from the wrath of the jealous King Saul, who both loves¹⁰⁹ and hates David.¹¹⁰ David seeks sustenance from rich Nabal while he is living in the wilderness with his men of war to escape Saul's rage and destruction. Nabal, true to his reputation, scorns David, refusing him any supplies. One of Nabal's young men comes to Abigail carrying the urgent message of their impending doom because of Nabal's actions. He says, "Now therefore, know and consider what you should do, for evil is plotted against our master and against all his household; and he is such a worthless man that no one can speak to him."

Abigail immediately prepares many supplies, without informing her husband, and sends her young men ahead as she follows, to find David in the wilderness. When they arrive, Abigail dismounts, in humility appeals to David, bringing survival supplies and a wise message. Seeking forgiveness for any transgression, Abigail speaks of her desire to spare David, a man of God, from acting harshly in a manner that would hinder his kingship of Israel later, "by having shed blood without cause and by my lord having avenged himself."

David acknowledges Abigail's message, offering a blessing to her. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, and blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed, and from avenging myself by my own hand."

¹⁰⁸ 1 Samuel 16 chronicles Jesse's son David, the youngest son nearly forgotten by his father, but chosen by God to be anointed as the next king of Israel.

¹⁰⁹ 1 Samuel 16:21-23.

¹¹⁰ 1 Samuel 18:10-13.

Upon her return home, Abigail finds her husband partying and very drunk. After he is sober, Abigail reports to Nabal what she has done. The Scripture reports, “his heart died within him so that he became as a stone . . . about ten days later . . . the Lord struck Nabal, and he died.”

Even though this is an amazing account of a courageous woman in a patriarchal setting, Abigail has been given a lot of bad rap for her behavior. One writer goes so far as to accuse her of causing David’s later moral failure with Bathsheba.¹¹¹ The author of the biblical text, however, differs with this assessment.

It is the man of God, David, who understands Abigail’s discernment and wisdom and offers words of blessing. God intervenes with her wicked husband. Abigail’s wisdom and actions offer life to both of the leading men in this account, her husband and David; one refuses while the other one blesses her.

One will notice Abigail’s humility and appeal. She does not go to her husband, hands on her hips, to inform him of his failure, or to instruct him on how he should behave. She acts quickly, without fanfare, humbly offering survival gifts to David to save her whole household. God sees, blesses, and affirms the offerings of her heart and her resources. Abigail’s subtle, behind-the-scenes actions affect not only her household, but also the history of the nation of Israel.

Queen Esther holds a significant place in Israel’s history, remembered yearly even to this day through the feast of Purim.¹¹² Her narrative is embedded within the reign of wicked King Ahasuerus, ruler of the Medes and the Persians, who ruled Israel at that

¹¹¹ Institute of Youth Conflicts, comp., *Character Sketches from the Pages of Scripture, Illustrated in the World of Nature* (Oak Brook: Rand McNally, 1976), 299.

¹¹² The Book of Esther narrates the account of the Jews being saved from destruction, remembered by the Purim celebration each year.

time. King Ahasuerus gave a banquet for all his princes, attendants, and royal officers, flowing with alcohol and entertainment. It was during this royal debauchery that the king summoned Queen Vashti to be brought so that her beauty could be displayed before the drunken crowd. Upon her refusal to comply with his request, King Ahasuerus, with counsel from his wise men, dethroned Queen Vashti so her influence of defiance against her husband would not infiltrate the land.

It is during the king's search for a replacement queen that Esther comes upon the scene. Beautiful women were herded to the palace to be prepared by ritual ceremony for a one-night stand with the king, before being sequestered in the concubine quarters for the remainder of their days, unless they found favor in the eyes of the king during their encounter with him.

Esther, a young Jewish orphan girl, cared for by her uncle Mordecai, was taken to the palace for preparation to meet the king. Esther found favor with Hegai, the man in charge of the women in their preparations, and he expedited her preparations with cosmetics and special foods.

When it was her turn to go in, King Ahasuerus loved Esther "more than all the women, and she found favor and kindness with him . . . so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen . . ."

It was shortly after Esther's crowning that her uncle Mordecai refused to bow to the promoted officer Haman, incurring his wrath. In his rage, Haman conspired to kill not only Mordecai, but also all the Jewish people of the land, because of his hatred for the Jews. Mordecai saw his opportunity of rescue through his Jewish niece, Queen Esther, now in the palace. Sending messages to her, he stated, "...if you remain silent at this

time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?"

Queen Esther realizes that to approach the king without being beckoned could be her death sentence. She calls Mordecai and the Jews with him to "fast for me, do not eat for three days, night or day." She and her maidens also fasted in the same way before she went in to the king, which was not according to custom. "If I perish, I perish," Esther declared.

The king extends the golden scepter to Esther. Her appeal to the king was simply an invitation to an evening banquet with Haman, which she would prepare. Both men accepted an invitation for the following evening during the banquet.

Meanwhile, Haman's wrath toward Mordecai grew as he observed his defiant refusal to honor him. The narrative juxtaposes two women in the plot. Joining Haman in his desire for revenge, Haman's wife advises him to build a gallows on which to hang Mordecai in due time. The king then has a bad night. A history of the kingdom read to the king at his request, exposes that Mordecai had saved the king's life from two plotting eunuchs on his staff. Haman is duped into giving to Mordecai the honors he thought he was receiving from the king.

At Esther's second banquet, she exposes Haman's plot against the Jews to the king, along with her identity as a Jewess. The king's anger was appeased as Haman was hung on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.

Queen Esther further pleaded for the lives of her people, which King Ahasuerus granted, and "for the Jews there was light and gladness and joy and honor." An annual

feast on the day of their deliverance from impending destruction was initiated as the days of Purim so “their memory [would not] fade from their descendants.”

Queen Esther exhibits a powerful example of a wise woman living through the frame of “veiled glory.” While her identity, the origin of her people, was hidden when she was brought to the palace, her personal presence gained the respect of all those around her.

In her time of trial and uncertainty, Esther called those around her to prayer and fasting. She knew the true source of power and wisdom. Her careful and respectful appeal to the king gained his favor, the favor of this wicked king who had only recently deposed his queen for insubordination. She carefully and gently brought her information and request to the king.

One could conclude that this story was divinely orchestrated. God was the One arranging these details. The providential interventions of God to save His people from destruction create the undertone of this narrative, to be sure. However, this account also shows the power of feminine “veiled glory” enacted and used by God to accomplish His purposes. As a woman of unequalled grace and beauty, Queen Esther had crucial decisions to make that called for her ultimate surrender to the protection of God and to the leadership of both King Ahasuerus and Mordecai. God honored Esther’s dependent and surrendered heart. She stands throughout the centuries of time as a wise woman of Israel.

Three New Testament Narratives

Mary the Mother of Jesus. The angel Gabriel is commissioned to the house of young Mary to announce the incarnation of God to be accomplished through this young

woman. As mentioned early in our discussion of “mother,” some of the first words we hear uttered from Mary’s mouth are the words, “be it unto me according to thy word,” but only after she inquires of the angel how his incredible message could be true, seeing that she was not married. We actually know so little about this woman who, by some, have divinized and deified her. While Anabaptists do not hold to this theology, the fact remains that the Scripture informs us that Mary is a woman favored by God and she gives birth to the incarnate Lord Jesus, God in human flesh. The angel addresses Mary with these words, “Hail, favored one, The Lord is with you.”¹¹³ What an amazing message to receive from an angel! Studying Mary’s example promises to provide women with insight into what gains one favor with the Lord.

Mary’s humility and surrender must not be overlooked as well as her youthful and favored status. “That ‘virgin’ specifies Mary as a young girl of marriageable age (i.e. approximately 12-13 years old) and as a virgin in a narrower, sexual sense is demonstrated both by her self-assertion . . . and by attention to Jewish marriage regulations.”¹¹⁴

“Mary’s response to the divine announcement . . . embraces the purposes of God, without regard to its cost to her personally. Her response is exemplary, demonstrating how all Israel ought to respond to God’s favor.”¹¹⁵ One can add that this “favored” woman of the Lord offers traditional conservative Anabaptist women a powerful example of living into the Lord’s favor.

¹¹³ Luke 1:28.

¹¹⁴ Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 86.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

The amazing responsibility that Mary agreed to take on did not come with the promise of a life of ease. In fact, at the time of Mary's purification ritual at the temple eight days after the baby's birth, a prophecy was given to her. Simeon, "a righteous and devout" man "looking for the consolation of Israel" with "the Holy Spirit ... upon him" prophesied that "a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that many hearts may be revealed,"¹¹⁶ mysteriously troubling words that Mary "pondered in her heart."

In our consideration of the metaphor of "veiled glory," the "veil" that we observe in this account of Mary's response to the annunciation is multifaceted. A youthful village girl's status shrouds the role she will play through the centuries of history. Mary's obscurity does not limit, but actually enhances, the work of God. A willingness to believe God's message through the angel, agreeing to the use of her body for God's greater purposes, reveals an image of God's sacrifice of offering His Son in bodily form.

The Woman with the Alabaster Box. Luke tells us about a "woman of the city" that came into Simon the Pharisee's house where Jesus was reclined to eat.¹¹⁷ It appears to be a gutsy move for a sinful woman with a bad reputation and a negative identity. For this sort of woman to enter the house of a Pharisee is unconscionable. Pharisees were Jewish religious leaders with pristine religious reputations, adhering to the strict Jewish ceremonial laws. Her behavior seems an outright violation of the Pharisaical standard. The fact that Jesus was invited to the Pharisee's banquet implies "that the Pharisee has

¹¹⁶ Luke 2:35.

¹¹⁷ Luke 7: 36-50 contains the full narrative of this story.

sufficient trust in Jesus' ritual purity to share a meal with him,"¹¹⁸ yet the woman's presence has introduced a powerful contagion, "a ritual impurity."¹¹⁹

Standing behind Jesus, the city woman weeps, so much that her tears make his feet wet, so she wipes his feet with her hair. One senses her attempt to wipe away the shame and confusion of her life, mingled with her uncontrollable flood of emotion. Simon looks onto the scene with scorn, internally noting that Jesus could not possibly be a prophet if he was clueless about what kind of a woman was touching him.

Jesus has a story to tell Simon that compares two moneylenders that cannot pay their dues. The one with the greatest debt cancelled will have the most love for the forgiving owner, Simon correctly guesses. Jesus then makes the scathing connection between Simon and the one who "had been forgiven the least." In reality, Simon's huge debt could not be forgiven because "he loved little."

This nameless "sinner" from the city, bringing her tears, her shame, and her contrition, received the glorious forgiveness of the Father, veiled from the sight of the self-righteous Pharisee blinded by his pretentious self-righteousness. The beauty of her broken heart was shrouded by tears flowing from the sorrow of a disreputable life. Jesus had eyes to see the truth of what the world around him deemed as despicable.

"Jesus seeks to bring insight to a Pharisee while responding to the dramatic action of the woman who says no words, but . . . speaks by her actions."¹²⁰ Jesus offered kindness, forgiveness, and, the most scathing of all, defense, for this woman, who, in her

¹¹⁸ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1997), 308.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Tannehill, 135.

desperation, dared to enter into “enemy” territory to seek Him. Her courage to stand against the tide of the religious rule of the day to receive the forgiveness and peace for which her heart so desperately longed offers us an example for today.

The metaphor of ‘veil’ takes on several meanings in this account. Jesus is able to see the true beauty of this marginalized woman’s heart that was not visible to Simon the Pharisee. The tears and desperation of a woman’s heart often hides, or one could say, ‘veils’ the true beauty of the heart. The theme of the mystery of God seems imbedded in this account as well. While God is not sinful, our view of God is often marginalized by our inability to see the reality of what God sees. This city woman’s discernment enabled her to ‘see’ what Simon the Pharisee could not see.

The aroma in Simon’s house and on Jesus’ feet gave witness to the beauty of a woman’s desperate heart courageously spilling her gift to honor the presence of Jesus. The same aroma that defiled a Pharisee’s house offered a memorial to the One with the greatest capacity to love. As the city woman left Jesus’ presence, her peace-flooded heart had received forgiveness and blessing, freeing her heart to live into her true beauty.

The account of Mary Magdalene found in John twenty, provides yet another compelling window into the metaphorical “veiled glory” of the feminine. In grief, Mary Magdalene, one of the “ministering women,” who had followed Jesus’ ministry and had supported Jesus and the disciples “out of their private means,”¹²¹ followed those taking the body of Jesus to the tomb on the evening of the crucifixion.¹²²

At dawn after the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene, the gospel of John reports, is hurrying to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus with spices. She finds the stone rolled

¹²¹ Luke 8:1-4.

¹²² Luke 23:55.

away from the mouth of the empty tomb, and she runs to tell the disciples that Jesus is not there.

John writes a lot of detail about who arrives first at the tomb, who goes inside the tomb, and the details of the findings of the grave clothes. Then the disciples go again to their homes. However, Mary stays.

As Mary stands weeping at the empty tomb in confusion and fright, someone calls her name. She does not recognize the one speaking her name is Jesus. Of course, she had no idea that Jesus would be alive. No one understood about Jesus' resurrection, even though He had specifically told His followers several times.

Finally, upon recognition, Mary runs to Jesus, clinging to Him. Jesus instructs her not to cling. Possibly her energy held a tone of "Don't you ever leave me again!"

While Jesus stands firm with loving boundaries, He believes in the power of Mary's voice, commissioning her to "Go tell" the most amazing news that has ever been given! While we have no record of Mary preaching a sermon to a large crowd, she is sent by Jesus to tell "My brethren" the reality of His resurrection. Notice Jesus' affirmation of Mary's "voice" by entrusting her with this phenomenal message, the best news ever told!

Exemplary and compelling biblical narratives of women gone before provide a frame for contemporary conservative Anabaptist women to live into the motif of veiled glory. Inherent in the narrative is the underlying message of God's presence and direction going before these women into the events of their lives. Just as the Shekinah led Israel through the wilderness, so this mysterious presence of God guided women of old to make courageous choices that engaged God's presence, thus revealing it to their world.

Women in conservative Anabaptist communities carry an important legacy in their world today. The powerful movement of God's Spirit continues to guide contemporary conservative women to bear this intuitive and mysterious presence, often behind the scenes. God wants to be known today not only from the pulpit, but also from the fray of life, in the everyday places of family and food.

In our fast-paced, technological world that affects all of us, to some extent or other, the question remains, how can we live from this sense of divine guidance? It is in the quiet inner chambers of a woman's heart that the life of the Spirit is conceived. Just as a mother's body nurtures her newly conceived and unborn child, so the life of the Spirit is interacting with one's spirit communing with a woman's personhood and personal identity. As the influence of this inner life mingles with others, communities grow in harmony, powerfully revealing the often-hidden power of the kingdom of Jesus.

Spiritual disciplines, developed and found tried and true over the centuries of the church's history, help to form and nurture one's inner life. Our study now turns to exploring some of these practices, which enable one's heart to open to the presence of Jesus daily through the Holy Spirit.

Women Empowered to Live into Veiled Glory Through Spiritual Transformation

Spiritual transformation of the heart is required to effectively reflect 'veiled glory,' the traditional feminine constructs we have been considering. 'Veiled glory' challenges and contradicts one's human nature of self-promotion. The gospel of Jesus requires servanthood, leading to the beautiful harmony that signifies the kingdom of Jesus. This calls both genders to a spiritual transformation that empowers us to live into

this high calling. We will specifically focus on spiritual transformation of the traditional feminine.

Dallas Willard notes, “The ‘spiritual’ side of us—though it is not perceivable by the senses and though we can never fully grasp it in any way, “ is never entirely out of our minds . . . It always stands in the margins of our consciousness.”¹²³ The hidden dimensions of each human life is not visible to others, nor is it fully graspable even by ourselves. . . it is complex and subtle—even devious. It takes on a life of its own. Only God knows the depths of who we are, and what we would do.”¹²⁴

Willard continues, “But Jesus moves into and through those very depths, whatever they contain, to bring us home to God. . . . The spiritual renovation and the ‘spirituality’ that comes from Jesus is nothing less than an invasion of natural human reality by a supernatural life ‘from above.’”¹²⁵

Several important categories emerge from the spiritual formation material reviewed and my own experience of counseling with conservative Anabaptist women and with ladies’ groups. Experience is a necessary component of true spiritual formation found through several significant venues. Time, which involves silence, solitude, prayer, and meditation on Scripture are time-honored spiritual disciplines which assist the claiming and living out of our calling as women in conservative Anabaptist settings.

Spiritual disciplines, Willard writes, “rightly understood, are time-tested activities consciously undertaken by us as new [practices] . . . to allow our spirit ever-

¹²³ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 18.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

increasing sway over our embodied selves.”¹²⁶ “Spiritual disciplines are activities in our power that we engage in to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort.”¹²⁷

Time. As Tozer aptly points out, “the [woman] who would know God must give Him time.”¹²⁸ Our current culture and life situation certainly give us ample opportunity to avoid our hearts through the distraction of a busy schedule.

Henri Nouwen calls this “wasting time with God.” He notes, “Prayer is primarily to do nothing useful or productive in the presence of God.”¹²⁹ Notice that prayer, silence, and solitude blend as one commits time to sit in God’s presence. “The careful balance between silence and words, withdrawal and involvement, distance and closeness, solitude and community forms the basis of the spiritual life and should therefore be the subject of our most personal attention.”¹³⁰

Prayer in silence and solitude is “not emptying ourselves . . . so as to achieve emptiness,”¹³¹ or another kind of religious experience. “It is Christ-centered.”¹³²

Jesus is our example. Each of the gospels recount multiple times when Jesus went away, sometimes on a mountain or in the desert, to spend time alone with God.¹³³ On

¹²⁶ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 86.

¹²⁷ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper, 2006), 52.

¹²⁸ A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of Man: The Divine Conquest of the Human Heart* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1978), 22.

¹²⁹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, Michael J. Christensen, and Rebecca Laird, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 19.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹³¹ Anthony Campolo and Mary Albert Darling *The God of Intimacy and Action: Reconnecting Ancient Spiritual Practices, Evangelism, and Justice*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007). 139.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 139.

several occasions, Jesus withdrew with His disciples for times of rest and reflection.¹³⁴ Jesus needed these times of solitude, alone, and with his disciples, to stay attune to the presence of the Father. So do we.

Valerie Hess writes, “The discipline of solitude involves finding a quiet place so we can be more aware of God-with-us (Emmanuel). But it also involves learning to quiet our mind and thoughts . . . [in order to] have a place of peace and stillness deep in our hearts at all times, a deep abiding awareness of the presence of God in us.”¹³⁵

Scripture. Mulholland delineates well how formational reading of the Scriptures differs from informational reading. Formational reading is reading in depth, allowing the text to master the reader as the object being shaped in the reading process. This requires a humble, detached (as opposed to controlling), receptive, loving approach, with openness to mystery.¹³⁶ Formational reading, then, allows one to experience the living reality of the Author of the text through the narratives of the Scripture.

This is sometimes called *lectio divina*. “Our task as friends of Jesus is to train ourselves to listen deeply to Jesus’ words . . . not trying to hear audible words from God, [but] listening to how Jesus might be prompting us to live and love.”¹³⁷

While the Bible for many Anabaptist women has been used as a religious tool to obligate conformity to the community, using Scripture that interacts with the themes

¹³³ Matthew 14:13, 23; Mark 3:13, 6:46, 6:31; Luke 4:42, 6:12, 9:10; John 6:15.

¹³⁴ Mark 6:31, John 6:3.

¹³⁵ Valerie E. Hess, *Spiritual Disciplines Devotional: A Year of Readings* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007), 133.

¹³⁶ M. Robert Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room, 1985), 55-59.

¹³⁷ Campolo and Darling, 115-116.

being studied in therapeutic counseling groups has been an important way of opening the door to invite women who may have otherwise found the Scripture as an ‘enemy’ to reframe their view. Within the caring “community” of group, the heart may be more receptive to hear the Word through a less fearful lens.

Using the stories of women in Scripture, such as the narrative accounts of Jesus interacting with women in the Gospels, helps women from traditional Anabaptist communities to connect more experientially with their calling of “veiled glory.” Through these narratives, we are invited to “be” the women, to receive Jesus’ kindness, attention, affirmation, and defense just as Mary Magdalene, or the woman caught in adultery,¹³⁸ or the “sinner” woman from the city with the alabaster box who dared to find Jesus in Simon the Pharisee’s house.

Community. Historically, for Anabaptists, one experiences the presence of God through the community of believers, the church. One author explores the concept of the Church as the sacrament of Christ, “revealing the mystery of the presence of Christ with us.”¹³⁹ While Anabaptists take issue with the theological construct of the notion of “sacrament,” understanding that the community of believers becomes an agent of the love of Jesus is essential to our experience of the presence of Jesus in our lives. It is through our experience together as believers that we “receive God’s vision for our wholeness,” defensiveness leaves, and genuine love predominates our interactions.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ John 8: 1-11.

¹³⁹ Christopher F. Mooney, *The Presence and Absence of God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1969), 81.

¹⁴⁰ Willard, 194, 195.

Therapeutic groups that offer an opportunity to face our unhealthy emotions with confidential, trusted friends provide an experience of spiritual community.¹⁴¹ A group setting helps us to see and talk about our emotions, even the dark side of them, and welcomes our tears. For many women in traditional settings, this place of love and acceptance opens the opportunity to face and claim areas of their own hearts that they have blocked and refused to face. An experience of the love and care of Jesus flows through the face of another accepting group member. It is through this context that we challenge each other as women to embrace our feminine calling.

Michael C. Gemignani, in *To Know God: Small-group Exercises for Spiritual Formation*, names structure, commitment, and discipline as three components of praxis in spiritual formation. These elements are foundational for conservative Anabaptist women to embrace “veiled glory,” and their creative identity with the feminine elements of God. About structure he says, “I mean simply a pattern or framework in which we practice our commitment and discipline.”¹⁴²

Structure, commitment, and discipline blend to form a foundation for growing in the transformational process. Gemignani says, “Commitment means we must say yes to the invitation to come to God in love, and to allow the Spirit to begin the work of transformation in us that only God can do.”¹⁴³

Focused women’s groups are a significant way for women to find and claim the power to embrace veiled glory. Commitment grows in the context of group work

¹⁴¹ Paul Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2008), 130-136.

¹⁴² Michael C. Gemignani, *To Know God: Small-group Exercises for Spiritual Formation* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2001), 7.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

because, while the group can be helpful in providing a safe context to experience the presence of God, individually each woman needs to purpose in her heart to draw near to God. The group can invite each individual, but it cannot make this purpose happen.

Summary

This project is not intended to be comprehensive in nature regarding issues that women in traditional conservative communities face. Instead, it is intended to bring insight and motivation about living into the power of the design in which women are created through the traditional understanding of the feminine. The intent is to discover biblical insight from a traditional perspective that shows us how women uniquely bear the image of God. A sense of identity and wholeness can come through discovering and embracing these insights.

Women are not mindlessly obeying male leadership because that is what is required of them. Instead, through a heart ignited by a sense of the Creator's beauty and intrigue, women find freedom to embrace the core design in which they have been made. This is now not a mindless submission imposed by another human, but it is surrendering to the nurturing, compassionate Creator of our lives Who guides us with strength and power. It offers the means of leaning into the Creator's sustaining power, growing in trust.

From this vantage point, women are free to choose to follow in ways that do not always represent the choices she personally would make. There is an ebb and flow in relationship where both genders are honored. As the masculine leads with a servant's heart attuned to the feminine voice, a synergy results which offers the world a picture of Trinitarian relationship.

As a woman in a traditional community knows and embraces “veiled glory” and how it reveals something of the essence of God uniquely to the world, her heart can become ignited and empowered by the Holy Spirit to participate in this calling. This is not to imply a woman must always blindly trust masculine leadership in her world. Trust is earned, not demanded by brute force.

This document envisions the divine intention of the genders through a traditional view. The delight and harmony that Lady Wisdom brings to the Creator provides insight into the intended dance of harmony between the genders. Each gender participates in the flow and movement of the dance.

The power of this kind of feminine surrender opens the opportunity for life and goodness in a woman’s life, and in the life of her husband, and any other person with whom she interacts. Instead of a woman becoming a victim of patriarchy or of her marriage, she becomes a participant in the grand scheme of the Creator. As Lady Wisdom reveals, she brings the synergy and harmony required for a finely tuned instrument reflecting the clear, pure melodious sounds of the creation. The Creator delights in the honor of her presence, even when the world around her may not validate her offerings.

SECTION IV: TRACK 02 ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

The attached artifact, a non-fiction book proposal, explores how the feminine reflects the image and glory of God through a traditional understanding of the Bible. While a traditional view of the Scriptures presents patriarchal leadership through the biblical narrative, embedded in the stories one finds feminine images of God's presence.

Jewish writings in various forms understand the Shekinah glory of God in the Old Testament to reveal the feminine elements of God. God is mother, the womb that formed, delivered, nurtured and cared for Her children. Lady Wisdom of Proverbs Eight describes the feminine counterpart as co-creator, working alongside the Creator with creative energy, voice, and mystery, calling to men to heed to her in the fray of life.

The metaphor of 'veiled glory' provides cohesiveness and insight to the discussion of the feminine elements of God's image and glory. Themes of mystery, pursuit, creativity and harmony bring substance to the 'veiled glory' metaphor. While these feminine images of God are more behind-the-scenes, the power of intrigue and invitation cannot be missed. Examining biblical narratives in the Scripture provides living examples of women who powerfully reveal the essence of 'veiled glory.'

Finally, it is through a disciplined spiritual life that women become empowered by the Holy Spirit to understand and embrace the calling of the feminine images of God they are called to bear. A life engaged in the Scriptures, prayer, meditation and community, enables one, by the Holy Spirit to live into 'veiled glory,' bringing shalom and hope to women embracing this calling.

SECTION V: TRACK 02 ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

A Book Proposal for

VEILED GLORY:

*How the Traditional Feminine Reflects
the Image And Glory of God*

Submitted by

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BOOK PROPOSAL OVERVIEW

VEILED GLORY:

*Discovering How the Traditional Feminine Reflects
the Image and Glory of God*

Elaine V. Yoder

How does a woman living in the fray of life as a busy homemaker and mother of crying children discover that she reveals a significant aspect of God's image and glory? In the obscure and unseen elements of nurturing and nursing a helpless infant, mothering reveals and ignites sparks of hidden elements of the feminine images of God, bringing significance to the lives of women.

1. THE CONTENT

A. Premise

Women who live in patriarchal communities often struggle to realize that they bear an important aspect of God's image and glory. In the fray of life, this can lead to women struggling to embrace their unique life's message and calling. The purpose of this book is to explore the feminine images of God found in Scripture, albeit more veiled, thus helping women living in traditional settings to find abundance and shalom in their lives.

B. Unique Selling Proposition:

If consumers in the target market purchase and read *Veiled Glory*, then they will identify and understand:

- the feminine elements of God's image.
- When these elements are missing, important aspects of how God wants to be made known to the world are missing.
- The impact on women when they do not know how they reveal important aspects of God's image.
- Women of the Scriptures who reveal the 'veiled glory' paradigm.
- How the contemplative life enables women to embrace the image of God that they reveal.

Because the book will:

- Inform women of their significant and powerful presence that reveals essential elements of God's image.
- Draw from Biblical passages as well as Jewish mystical writings to explore feminine images of God.
- Reignite the mystery that women carry by acknowledging how our ogle/google world dismisses the value and power of the hidden.
- Invite women to a contemplative life that empowers living into the calling of the sacred feminine.

C. Overview

The manuscript will be divided into four distinct parts:

➤ **PART I: The Feminine Aspect of God's Image Revealed**

Women living in traditional communities find themselves stuck between a patriarchal worldview that often suppresses the uniquely feminine voice, while the popular feminist ideation of the larger contemporary world scorns traditional values for women. As patriarchy is understood to be a venue through which God makes Himself known, discovering the feminine elements of God's image brings a richer understanding of this image in a patriarchal setting.

➤ **Part II: Veiled Glory, A Working Metaphor for the Traditional Feminine**

While the feminine images of God are more hidden, or 'veiled,' with a careful search, significant feminine images of God are present.

- The Shekinah Glory as the feminine aspect of God's presence.
- God as mother.
- Lady Wisdom as the feminine counterpart of the Creator.
- Lady Wisdom and the Traditional Feminine

➤ **Part III: Exploring the Biblical Accounts of Women Exemplifying "Veiled Glory" Through the Narrative**

Poignant narratives of many women in Scripture offer compelling insight into the motif of "veiled glory."

- Queen Esther
- Mary the Mother of Jesus
- Mary Magdalene

➤ **Part IV: Empowerment for Women Living into “Veiled Glory” Through the Contemplative Life**

Understanding and practicing the contemplative disciplines, which have been a part of believers from the first decades of Christendom offer empowerment to women embracing the ‘veiled glory’ motif in their lives. In the crucible of discipline, one finds the surprising personal power of surrender.

D. The Manuscript

1. Manuscript status: Five chapters are completed (they are attached to this proposal as sample chapters).
2. Special Features: Questions for discussion are found at the end of each chapter.
3. Anticipated length: 75,000 words.
4. Anticipated manuscript completion date: Approximately six months after receiving a commitment from a publisher.

II. THE MARKET

A. Characteristics

While the primary target audience is adult women from conservative traditional Anabaptist communities, (which include Amish, many derivatives of conservative Mennonite groups, German Baptist, and Old Order River Brethren). Most of these women are homemakers, mothers, grandmothers, aunts and cousins, age span from early twenties through sixties and seventies, who do not hold advanced educational degrees. This book will bring a unique perspective for women from all conservative traditions. Older teen girls will also gain insight and motivation to live compelling lives by reading this book.

B. Motivations

The audience for this book is made up of women from traditional conservative communities who hunger to discover and understand their unique calling and impact by design for their world. Because of confusion around gender issues in the conservative church, this book bears a compelling message of hope for women living in traditional settings.

C. Affinity Groups

1. Students from Bible colleges
2. Women’s support and caring groups
3. Women’s retreats and conferences
4. Researchers of gender issues
5. Devotional material for women’s private study

D. Competition

I have found no other book with this emphasis looking through a traditional lens.

III. THE AUTHOR

A. Background

I have a BS in nursing from George Mason University (1991), with 23 years of nursing experience, including emergency rooms and acute mental health units. After receiving a Master of Arts in Biblical Counseling from Colorado Christian University (1995), I joined the Life Counseling Ministries in Lancaster, PA in the heart of a large Amish and conservative Mennonite community as a counselor for women's issues, from 1997-present. I received an MSFL (Masters in Spiritual Formation and Leadership) from Spring Arbor University, Spring Arbor, MI (2010). I am completing a DMIN – Leadership and Spiritual Formation (ABD) from George Fox University, Portland, OR.

B. Previous Writing

One article published through DreamSeeker Publishing.

I have written a short published article and numerous short articles for the Life Counseling Ministries newsletter. I have never written a book, but I believe I would work well with an editor.

C. Personal Marketing

Life Counseling Ministries' newsletter has a readership of approximately 9,000, which includes a broad national base representative of the multiple forms of conservative Anabaptist communities.

I have developed material for a three-session workshop with this title presented at several women's retreats, ranging from 20 to 100 participants. I have presented these themes, under other titles, and have been well received, at a number of other women's retreats

I have approximately 615 'friends' on Facebook, which include people from academic communities as well as women from the conservative Anabaptist community.

CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

VEILED GLORY:

*Discovering How the Traditional Feminine Reflects
the Image and Glory of God*

Elaine V. Yoder

Introduction: The Traditional Feminine and God's Image

Thesis: Discovering and embracing the traditional elements of the feminine aspects of the glory of God as revealed in Scripture stands essential in assisting women in conservative traditional communities to find the abundance of shalom in their heart of hearts.

PART I: THE FEMININE ASPECT OF GOD'S IMAGE REVEALED

Chapter 1: God Wants to Be Made Known, Traditional Femininity Between a Metaphorical Rock and a Hard Place

Significant elements of the image and glory of God are minimized or totally lost when male leadership in a patriarchal setting becomes dominating. When our popular culture devalues traditional feminine values, women living in traditional settings can experience an influence that can lead to a loss of personal agency, increasing the minimizing of significant elements of God's image.

Chapter 2: The Shekinah Glory as a Feminine Image of God

Although more shrouded in the background, feminine images of God invite one to a richer understanding of the message of the Scriptures. The Shekinah Glory, found in the temple and the tabernacle behind the veil, offers us significant understanding about God's glory and presence. The rabbis, while not ascribing to anthropomorphisms related to God, describe feminine elements related to the Shekinah's presence in Israel. Jewish mystical literature expounds on these themes, bringing insight to feminine elements of God which exemplify the traditional understanding of the feminine.

Chapter 3: God as the Mother of Israel

In Deuteronomy thirty-two, God is revealed as the mother God who leads her children through the wilderness, offering nurture and sustenance to lead them to maturity. Throughout the prophets, significant elements and features of the compassionate motherhood of God are revealed through images of the womb, childbirth, and nursing.

PART II. VEILED GLORY: A WORKING METAPHOR FOR THE TRADITIONAL FEMININE

Chapter 4: The Lady Wisdom of Proverbs Eight

The Lady Wisdom of Proverbs eight stands centerfold to the seductress of Proverbs seven and the foolish woman of Proverbs nine to reveal a personification of the feminine counterpart of the Creator. Exploring this entity provides significant insight into the traditional feminine by hearing her call to relationship, bringing delight to the Creator and the Creation.

Chapter 5: Women and the Power of Mystery

The sense of mystery that universally surrounds the feminine finds significance in our study of the feminine images of God. Themes of intuitive wisdom, modesty, and godly invitation to the heart become germane to our discussion of aspects of God and the feminine.

Chapter 6: Motherhood and Veiled Glory

The compassion and nurturing of God coupled with profound desire for relationship with His children continue our discussion of the tender loving care revealed through the feminine elements of God's presence. The concept of the image of God brings significance to the beauty of motherhood valued in traditional communities. Not limited to marriage and family, the compassionate, nurturing qualities of the feminine expressed in single women also significantly reflect these feminine attributes of God's heart.

PART III: BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF WOMEN REVEALING VEILED GLORY

Chapter 7: Queen Esther Saves Her People from Destruction

Chapter 8: Mary the Mother of Jesus Surrenders to Her Calling

Chapter 9: Mary Magdalene Commissioned to Carry the Greatest News Ever Told

PART IV: SPIRITUAL FORMATION PRACTICES: THE KEY FOR WOMEN IN TRADITIONAL COMMUNITIES TO EMBRACE VEILED GLORY

Chapter 10: The Power of Discipline

As with all aspirations for kingdom of Jesus living, embracing the "veiled glory" paradigm in today's milieu requires Holy-Spirit-empowered guidance. Spiritual disciplines, practiced in the Church for centuries, invite one to contemplative living.

Chapter 11: The Discipline of Prayer and Presence

The disciplines of centering prayer, the prayer of *examen*, and *lectio divina* are practices which, in Dallas Willard's words, "empower us to do that which we cannot accomplish by direct effort."

Chapter 12: Revealing Aspects of God's Image by Embracing My Feminine Heart

It is time to summarize and name ways that women reading and engaging the material have been invited to embrace and internalize aspects of God's image and glory into their lives.

Elaine V. Yoder
93E Hilltop Drive
Conestoga, PA 17516

March 15, 2016

[personal agent name]

[agency name]

[street address]

[city, state, zip code]

Dear Mr. [agent name]:

I am presently looking for a literary agent. After reading some of the books you represent [name several...]—I feel that my book on feminine elements of God's image and how they are revealed in women ascribing to traditional gender values would fit your interests.

My premise is this: As women identify and embrace the feminine aspect of God's image and glory, more hidden in the background of the Biblical narrative, yet profoundly significant in making God known to the world, they find a deepening sense of identity and purpose. The purpose of this book is to energize women by claiming this calling.

I have a BS in nursing from George Mason University (1991), an MA in Biblical Counseling from Colorado Christian University (1995), an MA in Spiritual Formation and Leadership, Spring Arbor University (2011), and I am currently completing a Doctorate in Ministry through George Fox University (ABD). I have worked as a counselor at Life Counseling Ministries for approximately 18 years, from 1997 until now, focusing on women's issues, primarily from the conservative Anabaptist communities.

I have enclosed a complete proposal for your review, along with two sample chapters. This is my first book.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have. I am also open to feedback and would be grateful for the opportunity to explore how we might work together to find an appropriate publisher.

Sincerely,

Elaine V. Yoder

SECTION VI: POSTSCRIPT

One of the primary reasons I decided to do the Doctorate of Ministry program at George Fox was to write about the topic of this project in dissertation form, with the impetus to do research and find guidance by academic advisors. The theme of the Shekinah glory concept in Scripture, and how it reflects the feminine image of God was not only intriguing to me, but also seemed to have the potential of answering many unanswered questions about the role the feminine plays in a traditional patriarchal setting.

In many ways, doing the work of this dissertation has been more difficult than I could have imagined. With an awareness of the conflicted and opposing views around gender issues, both inside the conservative Anabaptist community and throughout the larger evangelical circles, I found myself constantly facing internal dissenting ‘voices.’

I was unprepared for the intensity of my own conflicted thought processes. Questions such as, “why is this study important to me,” and “will this work have value or only add to the confusion and conflict around gender issues?” almost paralyzed my work at times. My mother’s death, for which I had cared for eight years, came several months after beginning the sabbatical I was granted from my place of employment, adding significant delay to the completion of this project.

I have experienced supportive community as I have labored through the landmines of researching this topic. Leah Payne, academic advisor, and Donna Wallace, expert advisor, believed in the validity of this project to address the needs of the women from traditional settings that are often sidelined and minimized. My friend who provided beautiful, simple retreat space for me to reflect and write was invaluable to the process.

Not only did she offer space, but also times to wrestle with the issues that are crucial in both of our lives and ministry.

I have found significance to ‘the fullness of time’ concept from the Scriptures, realizing the two years needed to write this project was not wasted. Writing this dissertation now represents a significant part of my own healing journey. I have found that this project has merged significant themes from all the decades of my life. Early childhood wounds, my work in the fields of nursing and counseling, studying and growing in the disciplines of spiritual formation, caring for my handicapped mother, all helped me embrace more deeply that my life as a woman, in fact, does reveal something significant about God’s image, and how He wants to be made known in the world.

Many areas need further exploration. While this work is primarily about women in traditional settings finding and embracing their personal identity, more work is needed on praxis; themes of how to live well into the motif of ‘veiled glory.’ Identifying and facing how women participate in some of their victimization is an area of further consideration. The theme of misogyny, how it affects the care of the earth enlarges the conversation around honoring and embracing the feminine.

Writing a more detailed study guide to assist readers or study group members to personalize the concepts they are encountering will enhance the effectiveness of this material. A thoughtful time of journaling about difficult themes aids one in finding voice and inner healing.

I am grateful to my Creator, our Father/Mother God, for the opportunity to do this project.

Solo Dei Gloria!

APPENDIX 2: ARTIFACT MANUSCRIPT – VEILED GLORY

VEILED GLORY:

How the Traditional Feminine Reflects
the Image and Glory of God

By

Elaine V. Yoder

INTRODUCTION

There it was, a gem, lying in a very long expanse of sand on the shore, its brilliance glistening, nearly hidden from view. The moment the idea was uttered, it sparkled in my heart like a diamond in sunlight. *Femininity reveals a critical part of the image of God.* In a moment, the concept illuminated the reason for my heart's confusion about the significance of women—as reflected in my relationship with men and with God—even though it was still not the experience within my spiritual community for so many years of my life. The thought seemed almost too good to be true, yet there it was, truth resonating, tucked into the sand of my heart. A missing gem, this apt metaphor describes not only the dazzle of hope shining into my reality, but also the needed pursuit required to take and hold this precious treasure in both of my hands.

As I move toward the brilliant flash of light, it seems to disappear as quickly as I first sighted it. Another wave comes crashing in; the waters stir the shore. There it is again! The search is back on for this elusive jewel that promises hope and wholeness. If it can be held, it will illuminate the depths of a woman's soul.

The gem, this possibility that the feminine—the core of who I am--somehow reveals elements of the image of God, while also being uniquely female and essential to the world, slips away, easily lost in the fray of life. What does it mean if my femaleness reveals something significant, not only about the essence of God; but about how God makes God's self known to the world? It's a part that is needed to bring completion to the masculine revelation of God's image, not to obliterate or replace it, but to bring wholeness and health not only to my life, but also to many, many lives. In a brief moment, this concept revealed what my heart longed to know, bringing a deep settled

sense of security and peace to my soul. Yet it tantalized me. I wanted to know more about how God wants to reveal Himself through me ...as a woman.

It's difficult sometimes to know that a woman offers something of significance in a traditional community, especially for a woman who likes to study and explore ideas. It was the image of Shekinah glory written about in the Old Testament that felt important to help me understand what I intuitively knew, but did not experience. The first image seen in my mind's eye when I hear Shekinah Glory is the presence of God in the innermost chamber of the tabernacle, the movable house of God that the Lord instructed Moses to have the Children of Israel build with detailed instructions. This mysterious presence of God behind the veil, in the tabernacle, and later in the Temple, required radical respect.

The image of the Shekinah, God's presence in the inner chambers of His house, made me wonder if perhaps my beliefs have been misconceptions about what God thinks about women-- those condescending thoughts about being deceptive and weak, thoughts that didn't really match the narratives of Scripture. Maybe that's what they were ... misconceptions.

What if I *do* bring a significant element of God's image to bear upon my world as a woman? In a patriarchal world where men lead and are often dominant, it's difficult to know and embrace the possibility that my life symbolizes something of significance about God. I find I'm not alone in this struggle.

Not long ago, I was waiting in the seating area at an airport for an early morning departure. In the wee hours of the morning, still dark of night, I had left my house to drive several hours to the airport to catch the plane and I was happy to relax groggily on a chair, awaiting my flight's departure.

A mother with two sons came into the seating area to await the same flight. Her boys, probably middle school age, were each energetically pulling a piece of luggage. As they sat down, they pulled out electronic tablets to pass the time. Mom sat next to me and struck up conversation. “Where are you traveling?” she inquired. As I responded, she wondered about the reason for my travels. This query coming from a complete stranger felt pleasant, but unusual. I explained that I was writing a dissertation and was traveling to meet with my advisor. “What are you writing about?” was her next question.

I explained briefly that to satisfy a ministry degree I was researching and writing about a biblical view of how the feminine reveals the image and glory of God. The level of this woman’s conversation and interest led me to explain further. “One of the feminine images of God in Scripture is God as Mother. So every time you guide and care for these boys of yours, you are revealing something critical about who God is to the world.”

“Oh wow!” She exclaimed. “Thank you! You made my day!”

I hope I surprised her with a sense of joy even more than she surprised me by pursuing conversation. The flight was called and there was no more time for further exchange.

Over the past years, as I have researched this topic and talked with many women in various occupations, I have received the same surprised response. From the first pages of Scripture, we find that God created male and female in His image, yet it seems few women know with passion and purpose that they reveal primary aspects of God’s image. I have found over many years of counseling with women that this lack of knowledge can have a profound effect on a woman’s sense of personhood and value.

I'm becoming increasingly convinced that my feminine heart and the image it bears counts and matters in God's economy. I know instinctively that it holds jeweled value. In a twinkling, I have found what my heart has longed to know—that my femininity holds deeply abiding substance respected and affirmed by the Creator of my soul.

In my search, there have been crashing breakers attempting to obliterate this gem, sometimes carrying it back into the ocean of opposing voices. As I stand gazing at the roiling water, another breaker rolls in. There it is again, that glimmer of light, caught in the brilliance of the sun, beckoning me to pursue its presence and beauty.

In communities where men hold leadership roles, women's voices are often dismissed as invalid and too emotional. John's gospel offers us an example of how Jesus validated and commissioned a woman's voice, affirming the strength and the beauty of what women bring to bear. In John 20, Mary stays at the empty tomb, weeping in her grief, after the puzzled disciples had left. Jesus comes to her, revealing His resurrected presence, commissioning her to go tell the greatest message ever heard, 'to my brethren.' We will look with more depth in a later chapter at this pivotal narrative of Mary Magdalene's encounter with Jesus in the garden tomb.

I've pondered the brief interaction I had with the woman at the airport so early in the morning. Does she remember the conversation? Does the message of God as Mother continue to affect how she sees herself, and what she offers to her sons? It seems to take more than a brief and chance encounter with a stranger to change our view of ourselves without ongoing concentrated focus. Threaded throughout the Scriptures are feminine images of God, often veiled from view, as the Shekinah in the Holy of Holies, yet

significantly present and powerful. There are many stories of women whose lives radiate the glory of these feminine images, both in Scripture and in our contemporary lives, images worthy of our exploration and consideration.

In the following chapters, we will explore some of the feminine elements of the image of God. As we've already noted, the Shekinah glory is one image to consider. You may be familiar with some of the images of God as mother dispersed through the Scriptures, but did you know the entity known as Lady Wisdom in Proverbs chapter eight also offers critical images of the feminine aspects of God? While all of these images enhance and support each other, there is a sort of 'veil' to these images that shroud the glory of God that they bear. I find this fitting and exciting.

It's a worthy search, leading us to find glimpses of the more mysterious and hidden elements of God. Although there is vulnerability in hiddenness, there is also power through intrigue and invitation.

'Veiled glory' offers us a word picture, a working metaphor esteeming women living in communities whose practices follow traditional values. These images of God are no less critical or meaningful even though they are more hidden and behind the scenes. In fact, the power of mystery and intrigue enhance their beauty and desirability.

Many stories in Scripture introduce us to women whom the Lord used to reveal His "veiled glory," powerfully affecting their own and other's lives. These women of old are witnesses to us of the power of God revealed through the feminine heart. A closer look at these stories offers us insight into how the feminine reveals important elements of how those in the kingdom of Jesus operate and what is required of them as participants.

In our final chapters, we will consider practices that will enable us to embrace some of the hidden elements of God's beauty and glory that require courageous and active pursuit. Spiritual formation disciplines allow us to open our hearts to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, thus enabling us to live in God's presence and empowering us to allow Him to do in us that which we cannot do by our own effort.

Let us begin now by taking a more in-depth look at these feminine images of God.

Chapter 1

God Wants to Be Made Known: Traditional Femininity Between a Metaphorical Rock and a Hard Place

As Cheryl took her evening walk out around the back pasture on their small country farm, big puffy white clouds hung overhead, framing the wide expanse of blue sky. There was a hushed stillness in the air, calling her heart to open to the surrounding presence of God, just as the Scriptures said. “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is Your love for them that fear You.” Deep in her heart Cheryl wanted to claim that truth, but this evening, her heart felt burdened by the conflict in her marriage.

It had been a tough day. Donny, her husband, had spoken sharply that morning, accusing her of being an unsubmitive wife. The last several weeks, they could not see eye to eye on how to help their fourteen-year-old son, Adam, who was struggling with their rules about music. Donny often felt that Cheryl was too lenient with the children, giving them license to do the things of which he did not approve. Her heart hurt as she remembered how harshly Donny had responded to their son before he had left for school that morning. Cheryl did not know how she could handle the pain she was feeling so deeply.

We in traditional communities, such as conservative Anabaptist communities, adhere to a patriarchal understanding of leadership. Patriarchy calls men to take the lead, while women bring their voice through influence and support. It’s how it’s always been.

The significant passages of Scripture, particularly in the New Testament epistles, give affirmation to this emphasis. One primary passage, Ephesians 5, bears this theme. The apostle Paul writes: “The husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head

of the church.”¹ Paul further instructs wives to “be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”² At first glance, this straightforward instruction leaves little room for discussion. However, one little qualifying phrase in Paul’s instruction adds a new dimension to the discussion of husband/wife relationships, and, I believe, to gender relationships in the Christian community. The phrase, “As Christ is the head of the church” requires a careful look at Jesus’ relationship to believers, more specifically to women. Christ, our example of servant leadership, becomes the foundational premise on which patriarchal leadership rests. Servant leadership requires commitment to another person for his or her well-being regardless of personal cost. Servant leadership reshapes the parameters of patriarchal leadership.

The apostle Peter offers similar directives to marriage relationships. Both the husband and wife are instructed to follow the example of Christ, who, “while being reviled, He did not revile in return; ... but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.”³ While these instructions do not provide magical harmony in patriarchal settings, they provide direction for servant leadership that honors the kingdom of Jesus.

Women living in traditional patriarchal communities can struggle significantly to find a sense of personhood and voice. A distortion of male leadership can cause biblical male leadership to become male dominance. Dominance imposes the masculine will and power without regard to the feminine voice, thus silencing it.

¹ Ephesians 5:23.

² Ephesians 5:22.

³ 1 Peter 2:23.

Cheryl wants to be a good wife and mother, being submissive to her husband, but Donny's inability to hear her concerns leaves Cheryl feeling minimized and rejected. Accusations and demands tip Donny's leadership to demanding dominance.

On the other hand, our contemporary culture tends to minimize the traditional feminine roles, such as stay-at-home mothering. We can feel the ripple effect of freedom and accolades given to women in the larger community. Consequently, women in traditional communities can question their own significance in often-subtle ways. Mothering of infants and small children, for example, is a rigorous and demanding job without many immediate rewards. While our traditional communities support and encourage stay-at-home moms, contemporary society, with its subtle influence for education and professional work can become the opposing pressure – the 'hard place' juxtaposed by the rock of patriarchy.

Another example can be found in the church. Although conservative Anabaptist women have no expectation or aspiration for pastoral leadership, having a voice in the life of the church is a significant issue with which to grapple. Finding effective ways to hear the feminine voice presents challenges in patriarchal church communities where pastoral teams and executive boards are comprised solely of men.

The use of technology has affected traditional communities by increasing financial needs. Two incomes instead of one offer families more financial freedom to buy the latest and the greatest! It can lead to tough choices, and a lot of underlying dissatisfaction. A simple way of life comprised of gardening, and the canning and freezing of produce requires a lot of time and energy often not found to be very appealing.

Is there any value in continuing some of these practices that our mothers and grandmothers taught their daughters and granddaughters?

Hidden in the shadows of the patriarchal tradition lurks some compelling questions. What are some of the foundational biblical principles that substantiate the traditional identity held for women in a patriarchal community? Do women bring anything of significance to a patriarchal system? Was the plan of the Creator to relegate the voices of women living in traditional conservative communities to insignificance in a world where men hold the public leadership roles? While the popular feminist movement brings much-needed exposure to the hideous abuses perpetrated against women across the ages, still we are left to wonder if something significant and primal was lost with a wholesale movement away from a patriarchal worldview. Effectively wrestling with these questions requires an examination of the traditional understanding of the original intentions of the Creator. It goes back to the Biblical narratives of the beginning of time, when humankind was created in the image of God, the Creator.

As we look together at who we are as women through the lens of traditional conservative understanding of the biblical narrative, we can more effectively grapple with the failures, weaknesses, and abuses of patriarchy. Discovering the biblical underpinnings of the traditional understanding of the traditional feminine, and how it uniquely bears the image of God will help us to make wise choices. Like Cheryl, we as women in traditional settings want to discover and embrace a life of shalom as we press into our creative design.

Theologian Leon R. Kass writes compelling words about the primary role of patriarchy. He finds patriarchy to be about teaching a man to be “a proper husband and

father” through the “task of transmitting their moral and spiritual heritage.” This transmission is at the heart of the meaning of marriage.”⁴ Kass goes on to say that in marriage rightly understood, man will cleave to his wife not because she is “flesh of his flesh,” nor because she is beautiful or because she loves him back, but because she is his coequal partner in the work of perpetuation.”⁵ He finds this to be a common theme coming through the Jewish Scriptures, “Abraham, who, like most men, needs much more instruction in these matters [the task of transmitting heritage] than does his wife.”⁶ This transmission of heritage holds an important truth threaded into the Psalms.

And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Thy strength to this generation, Thy power to all who are to come. For Thy righteousness, O God, reaches to the heavens, Thou who hast done great things; O God, who is like Thee? (Psalm 70: 18,19).

For He established a testimony in Jacob, And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, That they should teach them to their children, That the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, That they may arise and tell them to their children, That they should put their confidence in God, And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments, and not be like their fathers, A stubborn and rebellious generation, A generation that did not prepare its heart, And whose spirit was not faithful to God. (Psalm 78:5b-8).

Kass brings us an important element of God’s goal in patriarchy – that of the coequal partnership that God has designed through both genders working together in harmony, blending to make God known. Each gender brings his and her unique elements of strength, and weaknesses. One is not better than the other. Both genders equally need to participate to accomplish God’s purpose of the revelation of His image to the world.

⁴ Leon Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 297.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 297.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 297.

5. What is the most difficult thing about living in a traditional community that you face?
6. What do you appreciate the most about the community you live in?
7. Is the concept of the Shekinah glory bearing the feminine image of God unsettling? Interesting? Meaningful to you? Describe.

Exodus 25:20, 22a

And the cherubim shall have their wings spread upward,
Covering the mercy seat with their wings and facing one another;
The faces of the cherubim are to be turned toward the
mercy seat ... and there I will meet with you.

Matthew 23:37

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets
and stones those who are sent to her!
how often I wanted to gather your children
together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under
her wings, and you were unwilling.

Chapter 2

The Shekinah Glory as a Feminine Image of God

It has been almost two decades since I was first introduced to the concept of the feminine qualities of God, the understanding of the Shekinah glory in the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures manifested feminine elements of the image of God. It was a passing side note offered from the personal reading of one of our instructors. While the Shekinah is not a word found in Scripture, it is widely understood by Biblical scholars today as the manifestations of God's presence with Israel throughout the whole of Scripture.

Old Testament Scriptures

As I began my investigation of the Shekinah bearing the feminine aspect of God's image, I first went to a local bookstore. I pulled multiple books from the shelves of the Jewish section to check indexes for references to the Shekinah. I consistently found the same definition listed. The Shekinah is the feminine aspect of the image of God. While Christian theologians mention the concept, the Jewish theological books offer a more comprehensive view.

The word Shekinah originates with rabbinic writings as they sought to understand the God that they serve. Of course, there are millennia of Jewish history. The concept of the Shekinah has taken on various forms, some that stand outside of the Christian Old Testament scriptures. Amazingly, though, as we look at the accounts of Old Testament writers, words and themes include feminine images, which powerfully reveal God's watchful care of Israel.

While the rabbis reject anthropomorphism, a word that describes assigning human elements and characteristics to God, the Shekinah for the rabbis describes God's nearness

to them. It reveals God's love and compassion. Their understanding of the Shekinah reveals how God cares for the affliction of the community, even the affliction of the individual. The feminine elements are inherent to the scripture passages because they are elements limited specifically to women.

Many Old Testament passages show us the image of the protective, motherly wings of God, surrounding and guiding Israel. In the next chapter, as we explore the mother images of God in more depth, we will discover that feminine, mother images describe God's care of the children of Israel as they traveled through the wilderness.

The Shekinah Glory in Jewish Literature

Some of the mystical body of Jewish writing expounds on the rabbinic texts, focusing on an experiential knowledge of God. "They reflect on what Barry W. Holtz describes as, "the intricate process by which divine life moves from concealment to disclosure—a process that, in the first place, occurs entirely within God."⁷

Students of these Jewish writings understand the wisdom they find to be foundational to all religion, nation or ethnicity, a body of spiritual Wisdom. . ."⁸ to describe God's truth according to its intended design. The Shekinah takes on images such as "daughter, bride, princess, queen. . . Not only is God Father, King, Judge, and Shepherd. God is also revealed through and signified by women . . . the processes within the life of God are . . . expressed in and through the male-female relationship."⁹

⁷ Barry W. Holtz, *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts* (New York: Summit Books, 1984), 319.

⁸ Philip S. Berg, *The Essential Zohar: The Source of Kabbalistic Wisdom* (New York: Bell Tower, 2002), 3.

⁹ Holtz, 338.

Everett Ferguson, a Christian writer begins his exploration of Christianity by acknowledging the importance of Jewish writings to our understanding of the Scriptures. He writes . . . “I consider Judaism the principal context of early Christianity.”¹⁰ These historical writers lend support to our comparison study of the feminine elements of the Shekinah and the conservative traditional view of femininity.

Shmuel Boteach, a contemporary American rabbi and Jewish writer, explores the feminine qualities of the Shekinah and the differences of men and women, which “are far from meaningless and arbitrary.” He argues for the necessity of the different gender roles so that “women will maintain their mystery.” A woman seeks God differently than men, but this should not be “construed as secondary.”

Boteach asserts that women are more private, and “can find God at home,” while “a man does not immediately see God’s light,” but a man must immerse himself in spiritual pursuit, needing regular public meetings for activities of prayers and pursuit of the Scriptures, “an environment where even he experiences the presence of God.”¹¹

Here Boteach is describing how essential the differences in gender are to spirituality and experiencing God’s presence. I have found in my years of counseling that what Boteach says is true and evident in the stories I hear. The traditional feminine, through a more private and intuitive way of knowing God, brings essential elements to the masculine that brings completeness and harmony to the pursuit of experiencing God.

¹⁰ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), xvii.

¹¹ Boteach, 183.

The Shekinah Glory in the Old Testament

Narrative from Scripture provides our primary source for exploring the concept of the Shekinah and the feminine elements it reveals. It was in the portable Tabernacle, and, later, in the magnificent temple that Solomon built for Jehovah God, the center of worship for Israel, that we find further foundational insight into the Shekinah Glory in the Old Testament. It was the communities gathering place of worship. Exodus 40:34 and 2 Chronicles 7:1 describes how the Shekinah glory rested in the Holy of Holies, the most inner chamber of the tabernacle and temple. A veil divided the inner chamber of the tabernacle and temple from the most Holy place. The High Priest entered the Holy of Holies only one time a year.

In this innermost Holy of Holies, the Ark of the Covenant stood that contained several items of remembrance, collected from the forty-year trek through the wilderness. Over the Ark of the Covenant was the Mercy Seat, overshadowed by the sculpted wings of the cherubim. Here, over the Mercy Seat, in the innermost chamber of the tabernacle and temple, the Shekinah dwelt, Jehovah's dwelling place among His people. Hebrews chapter nine reiterates in the New Testament how the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies only one time a year, bringing the required sacrifice of blood for the sins of the people.

An aura of sacredness and mystery surrounded the Shekinah in the Holy of Holies. It commanded respect, honor, and a careful reverence. Its mystery commanded a certain kind of intrigue and attention as the people waited outside for the High Priest to return during this yearly time of sacrifice for the people. Severe consequences resulted when there were violations of the parameters God placed around the Shekinah.

The New Living Translation renders Numbers 4:20 like this. “The Kohathites (a group from the priestly Levite tribe) must never enter the sanctuary to look at the sacred objects for even a moment, or they will die.” Pornography, the ogling of the precious, comes to mind as I consider the feminine themes considered in the inner sanctuary of the Tabernacle and Temple.

Eli the High Priest’s sons were haughty and disrespectful men. 1 Samuel 2:12 describes how these sons were “worthless men; they did not know the Lord.” They refused to follow the commandments of the laws of worship, operating as priests according to their own whims. Everyone in Israel suffered with the disrespect and violation of the inner sanctuary laws. Prophetic warnings carried severe consequences for Eli and his sons because of their sin. Soon after these prophetic messages, Israel was defeated by their enemies in war, leading to the death of Eli and his sons, with the tragic removal of the ark of God from Israel. The Shekinah, the glory of God’s presence, left the Tabernacle. I Samuel chapter four narrates this very dark time in Israel when the Shekinah presence left the inner sanctuary of the tabernacle. The absence of the Shekinah was called “Ichabod,” meaning “The glory has departed from Israel.”

As we consider feminine themes surrounding the Shekinah glory in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle/temple, we can see inferences of the value of women in the home, sometimes called ‘stay-at-home’ moms. It’s through this image we discover the sacred value of the hidden elements of God found as essential to the traditional woman’s life. The Shekinah was an essential, life-giving element of the tabernacle and the temple. The tragic absence of the Shekinah glory from the inner chambers of Tabernacle created an empty, lifeless vacuum. Women bearing the feminine reflection of God, bring an

essential presence and beauty to their homes. When mom is there, the world is secure and ‘right.’ Like Israel, when God’s presence and glory depart, the home becomes “Ichabod” when the feminine leaves. This highly valued essence in the traditional woman’s life is far from meaningless and unimportant.

Ichabod represented that the sustaining, nurturing, compassionate Presence of the Lord had departed. This compelling image brings us insight into marriages where there is abuse and tragedy—when the light leaves her eyes. In the same way, “Ichabod” images the empty vacancy that a woman leaves in a marriage when separation is necessary in the face of violence and trauma. It helps us understand the essential quality of light and presence that women bring to a home, the ‘inner chamber’ of our lives. When a woman is gone, the heartbeat of the home is gone. Darkness and emptiness fill the vacant space.

This feminine Shekinah image helps us understand the traditional sense of the power that women hold in their homes. It helps us see the essential quality that the light and presence of the feminine brings to her world. From this position, we see that women in the home are not sequestered or minimized, but essential for light and hope in their family and community. Creativity and motivation for excellence shapes one’s life as stay-at-home mothers embrace this image.

This leads us to another powerful image of the feminine aspect of God. It is the image of God as Mother who cared for the children of Israel as they wandered through the wilderness. As we explore these images, we discover important aspects of God’s compassionate care for ‘Her’ children.

Questions for Personal Reflection and Group Discussion

1. Describe how you are impacted by the concept of the Shekinah glory revealing feminine qualities of God.
2. Write out your thoughts about how the Shekinah is more hidden as it reveals feminine images of God.
3. How might hiddenness add power and significance to what the Shekinah brings to bear?
 - Consider and write about how a more behind-the-scenes hiddenness,
 - may enhance your femininity in your relationships.
 - lead you to feel more vulnerable?
 - How have you felt hidden and unimportant in your life? What have you done about it?
4. Ponder and write about modesty. How does it enhance relationships? How might it hinder?

Isaiah 46:3, 4

³“Listen to Me, O house of Jacob,
And all the remnant of the house of Israel,
You who have been borne by Me from birth
And have been carried from the womb;
⁴Even to *your* old age I will be the same,
And even to *your* graying years I will bear *you*!
I have done *it*, and I will carry *you*;
And I will bear *you* and I will deliver *you*.

Chapter 3

God as the Mother of Israel

A huge rock formation aptly dubbed “the haystack” dominates one’s gaze at the coastline of Cannon Beach, Oregon. With a sort of magnetism, its overshadowing silhouette beckons one to draw near to it. The declaration of the Psalmist comes to mind, “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress. . .”¹² Haystack’s presence and shadow provide a sense of protection from the coastal winds and waves for many little birds and creatures. For many, it also images the omnipotence and grandeur of our Father God.

In His desire to be known by His people, God has written Himself into Creation with images that reveal glimpses of who He is. Some images, however, are more subtle and easily missed.

I was invited recently to dinner with friends at a young couple’s home who had a three-month-old daughter. They served us a simple but delightful meal prepared together by our hosting couple, with intriguing after-dinner fellowship around the table.

During our extended conversation after everyone had eaten, Katie gently rocked her sleeping infant, swaddled in a soft white blanket, in her arms. I felt stirrings in my heart as I observed this mother gently and patiently rock her sleeping child.

What if this scene of Katie rocking her infant daughter reflected a significant image of God to me? How could embracing this image change the way I view God and

¹² Psalm 91: 1, 2a, KJV.

the way I view the world? The rock formation at Cannon Beach presents a much more familiar—and masculine—image of God’s care and presence.

Yet, the image of the Mother-God tenderly rocking her children in her arms can be startling, yet compelling. This is actually not a bizarre, unknowable idea. It is written in black and white in the Scriptures.

Through the voice of the prophet Isaiah, God describes ‘Herself’ as the one who “formed you [Israel] from the womb,”¹³ and then “now like a woman in labor I will groan, I will both gasp and pant.” Later we read, “The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother He named me,” The prophet continues to hear the Lord describe ‘Herself’ as mother, “Can a woman forget her nursing child, and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.”¹⁴ Using one of the most powerful of images to describe ‘Her’ nurture and compassion, the Lord likens ‘Herself’ to a nursing mother, where, emotionally and biologically, it is excruciating for her to forget her nursing child.

The Shekinah is the mother-God who led Israel through the wilderness.¹⁵ This ‘mother’ gives Israel birth, protects Israel, and guides her like a mother eagle teaching her young to fly. The mother-God nursed them on the journey, feeding them with the richest of fare: milk, meat, and the finest of fruit. Israel grew fat, well developed, like a healthy child with lots of energy. In this timeless, everlasting love story between God and Israel,

¹³ Isaiah 42:2, 14, Isaiah 44:24, Isaiah 49: 1, 2. This section of the prophet Isaiah’s writings uses strong feminine terms to describe God’s interactions with Israel.

¹⁴ Psalm 131:2, Here the Psalmist describes himself like a weaned child within me, my soul...” El Shad-ai – Shadi means breast of God, Nurturer, Provider.

¹⁵ Deuteronomy 32:10-18.

they are reminded that they have forgotten the God who birthed and nurtured them. Like a human mother, God's heart breaks.

Ascribing these images to the feminine is non-intuitive. Birthing, nursing, and mothering are functions only women are capable of performing. The feminine Shekinah also reveals the mother-heart of God, in the shadows or hovering over in the glory cloud, working behind the scenes to nurture, sustain, and protect Israel on her protracted journey through the wilderness. This Presence, though, is so easily dismissed and ignored by the children of Israel.

Just yesterday, I was speaking with a friend who had several weeks ago given birth to her first child. While beautiful pictures posted on Facebook of my friend and her babe displayed the joy and beauty of her motherhood, my friend's description of her labor and delivery add significant details to her story. "I was only a couple minutes from a C-section," she shared. The pain and intensity of the protracted moments of the labor pains, and the uncertainty of the possibility of a natural delivery etched her face as she spoke. She quickly agreed when I responded, "You must feel exhausted when you remember those moments."

This conversation adds a lot of depth and insight into the mother-God images. God describes 'Her' interactions with the children of Israel in the wilderness as labor pains. It reveals vivid images of the pain, investment, desire, and nurturing activities that God is doing for 'Her' children. We think of the wilderness experience as being excruciating struggle and hardship for the children of Israel, but the Mother-God is telling us of 'Her' pain and distress while mothering 'Her' children. This perspective adds significant fabric to our understanding of God's love and nurture for us, Her children.

One could argue that these mother images are only metaphors, descriptions of God's activity among His/Her people. This is accurate, but it is important to remember that *all* gender terms ascribed to God are metaphor. While engendered language is used to describe God as both male and female, in reality God is neither, while God is both. Metaphor uses language that offers images that are known and understood to bring insight into what is difficult to understand. The Lord gave us engendered names of Himself to help us understand, in meaningful terms, His/Her amazing love for us.

Exploring the feminine images of God not only brings us a deeper and richer understanding of God, but for women in particular, the importance of what the feminine brings to bear on the world! It helps us understand the great compassion and nurture the Lord offers His/Her children. It also brings credence to how women in traditional settings reveal God's image and glory, offering clues to how these roles and practices for women were established. A woman's often-tireless labor to serve her families matters. We have not only a God who sees (one of his names is *El Roi* "the God who sees") we pray to and are "known" by God, who bears our sorrows.

In a patriarchal culture where the masculine presence sometimes dominates, the community loses the attributes of God's motherly heart of nurture, compassion, and nourishment. The distortion of God as being only the strong father, the warrior who fights His enemies, or the king who rules with authority, offers an incomplete view of God. God is revealed then as only as an autocratic dictator waiting with a sword to attack defectors. The Mother-God images bring us an understanding of the compassionate, relational heart of God, the powerful image of the cloud and pillar that directed and sheltered God's children. This concept helps us to understand some of the weaknesses of the patriarchal

system that succumbs to hideous abuses perpetrated upon women. Sequestering women, maintaining “safe” boundaries, and silencing the feminine perspective, all increase the likelihood of abuses in a dominating patriarchal system.

So one could ask, why is the Mother-God addressed with pronouns of He and Him? A proposed answer to this question points to biological gender distinctions. The male, outward in nature, whose sex organs are external and the more visible, leads the way; while the female, whose primary sex organs are more internal, thus more subtle and hidden, nurtures life within herself, and, traditionally, through her home. While the subtle, internal nature of the feminine increases her vulnerability, she is no less important. It does establish the need for male pursuit, not with force and power, but with respect and care.

Dr. Dobson, well-known family psychologist, makes this observation when discussing male and female differences. “Female physiology is a finely tuned instrument, being more vulnerable and complex, than the masculine counterpart. Why some women find that fact insulting is still a mystery to me.”¹⁶ The statement represents how difficult it is for the genders to comprehend from the “other’s” point of view. Vulnerability is difficult, putting women at the risk of being used disrespectfully and painfully. The difficulty of “being a finely tuned instrument” is the vulnerability it requires, the potential physical pain, as well as the potential emotional violation of being used as an object. Especially for women who have experienced abuse, any vulnerability feels like an insult, a guarantee that abuse will happen again.

¹⁶ James C. Dobson, *Straight Talk to Men and Their Wives* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1980), 165.

This names one of the important reasons for our study. As a woman finds and embraces the truth of her design, hope and courage surround vulnerability, empowering her to make wise choices in relationships. By finding her own unique identity, a woman can find her God-given worth and the courage to choose healthy and difficult boundaries that she has previously felt powerless to make.

The feminine mother images of God become a critical window, enabling us to visualize with greater depth God's vulnerability with 'Her' children, with us. The anguish of labor, delivery, and the care of a newborn provide a dramatic window into the intense demands of nurture required from God's heart to help us flourish.

When a religious system does not ascribe to the feminine elements of God, it becomes subject to offering a fractured and distorted view of the Gospel. The kingdom of Jesus is about not only right belief, the more masculine focus of rule and order. Jesus' life on earth exemplified the nurturing and nourishing relational elements of His kingdom. While it is true that Jesus, while living on earth, took on masculine form, one could argue that Jesus was the most fully orbbed person who ever walked the face of the earth. Jesus revealed the Father in fullness. His pursuit of women in his ministry gives credence to their indispensable presence in bringing to bear the kingdom of God. As was mentioned earlier, exploring Mary Magdalene's pivotal role in bearing the news of Christ's resurrection to the disciples provides insight into how essential Jesus found the feminine voice to be.

Gertrude von le Forte builds her understanding of the 'eternal woman' around the theme of motherhood. She finds Mary the mother of Jesus to be central to understanding the significance of the mother image. Of Mary's response to the angel, "Behold the bond

slave of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word.”¹⁷ This author writes, “The mystery of the Redemption . . . is predicated on the humble fiat of her answer to the angel . . . the readiness of unconditional surrender.”¹⁸

This kind of surrender is not only about women. The woman, in her response to the angel, represents to all people the call to surrender. Le Forte states further, “the Virgin is therefore the revelation of the very essence of religious experience. . . . Mary. . . in her very being . . . reflects the religious nature of mankind which is at the bottom of all worship and in the form of the bridal woman symbolizes the power of surrender of all creation.”¹⁹

This surrender is not taking a mindless, unchosen course. Mary’s surrender comes from a heart convinced of the goodness of Divine intervention in her life coupled with a commitment to accomplish those purposes. The first words we hear her speak as recorded in Scripture are the words noted above, “Be it unto me according to thy word”; the last words, “whatever He says to you, do it,”²⁰ are words spoken as instructions to servants when the supply wine had run out at the wedding at Cana.

Motherhood and Traditional Femininity

The year that I was thirteen, our family became a part of a country church community during winter months in a neighboring state. It was an experience of paradox and contrasts. I was suddenly a student in an exponentially larger junior high and high

¹⁷ Luke 1:38.

¹⁸ le Forte, 3, 4.

¹⁹LeForte, 4.

²⁰ John 2:5b.

school than I had ever experienced while our family participated in a small rural conservative Anabaptist church.

It was during this experience that I gained some decided opinions about mothering. The young families in the church community had many small children, families that were actively growing each year! I sensed the overwhelmed feelings of fatigue and despair that seemed to envelop the young mothers.

There was constant activity. A nursing baby was crying, demanding nourishment, while toddlers were running around with snotty noses, pulling apart whatever was in reach. Witnessing mothers nursing babies was a new experience for me. It appeared indiscreet and contradictory to the conservative focus of a woman's modesty in public. My mom never nursed my brothers. This was all out of my realm of experience.

Watching these young mothers with their overwhelmed lives, the constant demands of crying babies and snotty nosed toddlers, made a lasting impact on my perception of mothering. I sensed their low-grade depression, a sort of resignation to a demanding life that afforded little enjoyment.

I could not imagine why a woman would choose this pathway for her life? Even at thirteen, I sensed a hopeless cycle of existence that would repeat itself again in a few short years. Life had to offer more than this, I concluded.

It is with a sense of grief that I look back on this early teenage experience in such a formative stage of my life. Mothering looked to me like a dutiful existence relegated to women in a smothering patriarchal world. I didn't have a lot of vision for my life, but I wanted adventure and purpose. I found the excitement of much broader horizons in nursing stories, like *Cherry Ames*, *Student Nurse*. These books offered dreams for

opportunity to explore a bigger world with a sense of adventure. Being a nurse would possibly spare me from a life of monotonous routine, providing a way of escape.

The examples of motherhood I was observing failed to show to me the beauty of the feminine image of God as mother. Motivation and enthusiasm for living with zest seemed nonexistent. Community expectations limited options outside of the daily grind of childcare. Life for these women appeared to be about a submission for women that obligated compliance to dominating men, who seemed emotionally detached from their families, without respect for the “finely tuned vulnerability” Dr. Dobson so aptly names.

Our world today needs mothers, women who love and nurture little ones with passion and presence. Creativity in designing beautiful places that make one’s home inviting, I’m discovering, creates adventure in homemaking. Mothering, however, is not limited to the biological ability to give birth.

The Single Woman and the Mother Image

It is now been fourteen years since my mother had a major stroke that left her entire right side paralyzed. My aging parents rapidly entered a physically dependent season, needing assistance, not being able to navigate life on their own anymore. It is a stage of uncertainty and pain for everyone involved. My involvement with my aging parents led me to understand the heart of God and the kingdom of Jesus in unexpected ways.

I faced seasons of “mothering my mother” for twelve years after her incapacitating stroke. The role-reversal was difficult for my mom. Not only did she lose her independence, but also the nurturing care of her husband, my dad, when he passed away four years after her stroke.

The difficulties of relationship for Mom and me were sometimes stormy and challenging. Confined to a wheelchair, mom would sometimes angrily say, “I have to go where you push me.” I learned a lot about the compassionate mother-heart of God, especially when things were difficult.

Our opening passage of Isaiah forty-six provides insight into the ongoing care and compassion that the ‘Mother-God’ has for Her children. Just as a mother’s love does not end as her child moves from infancy stage, so God’s love for ‘Her’ children never ends. With assurance, we count on the nurturing, unyielding, compassionate care of God even as we age. This compassion and care is more about a position of the heart than biology.

Single women who have not given birth to children biologically find many ways to bear the mothering image of God. The traditional mother’s day, though, often represents a day of grief and pain for women who have never given birth. There is also great joy in celebrating with those for whom this day is special. For me, it is a day that highlights the loss of my own mother two years ago, reminding me of days gone by, both good and hard. The sweet memories linger, tinged with the bitterness of imperfect relationship.

Although I am single and have no biological children, I sometimes receive phone calls wishing me a Happy Mother’s day. These come from people with whom I have journeyed and whose lives I have nurtured. I feel honored and loved when I receive these messages, yet in the same breath, I feel ambivalent. I gratefully receive the blessing of each who called me with their gratitude. I also want to bless their relationships with their mothers, however difficult those relationships may be. If my nurture of them as people aids in building meaningful relationships with their mothers, I believe my care and

nurture of them holds significance. These phone calls validate for me the mother image of God in my own soul. A part of my ‘mothering’ is and will continue to be helping to build bridges between daughters and mothers.

Questions for Personal Reflection and Group Discussion

1. Write several paragraphs about what you feel inside when you think of God as Mother.
 - Do you feel drawn to the concept or do you want to push it away? Why or why not?

2. The Mother-God fed Her children the finest of fare in the wilderness. Ponder this concept of God as One who offers good food. Write several paragraphs of your thoughts.
 - How might your reflection on this concept impact you as you think of your own food preparations that you do every day?
 - How could it make a difference in your everyday routine of food preparation?
 - How would more energy and creativity in your food prep change your meals?
 - How would it change relationships with those that you share meals?

3. The chapter described a young mother tenderly rocking her sleeping child?
 - Describe what it is like for you to ponder God’s care of the world in this way?
 - Is it believable?
 - Have you experienced God’s Presence in your life in this way? Journal about the thoughts that surface for you as you ponder this.

4. Spend a few moments in prayer asking the Lord what He wants to show you through your study of this chapter.

Lady Wisdom

Strongest arms and fiercest eyes
The song that calms your deepest cries
She's quick to climb in, draw in close
In children's laughs and wrinkled nose
She's in your face, she's mystery
She'll kiss your wounds and tie your dreams
In her hair gold harmony
She'll quiet restless wanderings
Life from her very breast, you'll drink
Without her hand, confusion bring
This haven heart holds purest babe
Her voice will shield you from the grave.
So wait for her and find her face
And love her honor, truest way!

Sara

Chapter 4

Lady Wisdom of Proverbs 8

Proverbs 8

¹ Does not wisdom call,
 And understanding lift up her voice?
² On top of the heights beside the way,
 Where the paths meet, she takes her stand;

⁴ “To you, O men, I call,
 And my voice is to the sons of men.

^{5b} “Listen, for I will speak noble things;
 And the opening of my lips *will reveal* right things.
³⁰ Then I was beside Him, *as* a master workman;
 And I was daily *His* delight,
 Rejoicing always before Him,
³¹ Rejoicing in the world, His earth,
 And *having* my delight in the sons of men.

The mystery surrounding Lady Wisdom has challenged and mystified theologians for centuries. Who is this feminine figure described in subtle terms that eludes concrete explanation?

Proverbs 8 introduces us to a feminine entity, the counterpart of the Creator. Lady Wisdom is difficult to define in solid, black-and-white terms, mysterious, quite similar to the way women are often labeled. The description of Lady Wisdom offers compelling glimpses of relationship, delight, and playfulness. It seems she brings harmony and goodness to her world. She calls us to explore and search for jewels locked in the intrigue of her treasure chest.

While Solomon is widely considered the writer of this poem, the identity of this feminine wisdom figure continues to be the topic of theological debate. Scholars are

fascinated with the rich metaphor found here and have long wrestled with how to interpret the femininity of Lady Wisdom.

The Hebrew words describing Lady Wisdom’s activities and beginnings are ambiguous and lead to many speculations. A few theologians choose non-gendered pronouns in their description of this entity, avoiding any reference to the feminine and this description of wisdom. A few even change the gender of the pronouns in their discussion to the masculine! Some describe Lady Wisdom as “the beloved child,”²¹ created by God before the creation of the world, or as an Old Testament reference to Jesus Christ.²² The Torah is another source that some Jewish writers consider, but early Christians would give their own answer to the question of where to find wisdom, as Jesus is portrayed as the word/wisdom “in the beginning.”²³ While all of these lend credible thoughts to the discussion of wisdom, let us consider the presence and function of the feminine elements that Lady Wisdom reveals, allowing her to inform our discussion of the feminine aspect of God’s image.

The feminine element of this personification cannot be easily ignored, Theologian Michael Fox notes, “First of all, Wisdom is portrayed as a woman, and whatever the degree of the distinctively female in the portrayal, her femaleness is now a fact which the readers cannot escape.”²⁴ He goes on to ponder the feminine presence in this

²¹Leo G. Perdue, *Proverbs*. (Louisville KY, John Knox Press, 2000), 143.

²²Daniel J. Treier, *Proverbs & Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos 2011), 51.

²³Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs: a Commentary*. (Louisville: KY, John Knox Press, 1999), 8.

²⁴Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: a New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*. (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 339.

personification and how it brings substance to the Proverb poet's teaching on wisdom. He writes:

Lady Wisdom is not a king figure. She is powerful, and she is the principle of dominion, but she does not herself exercise rulership. Instead others rule *by* her. Her influence is verbal, working through persuasion and appeal to affection, not through exercise of office and power. Her power and appeal come from the just workings of the universe and the good sense of individual minds rather than from the constraints and compulsions of political institutions.²⁵

Fox notes that a male personification in this poetry would change the understanding of wisdom that the poet is offering. "A male personification would make his authority institutional, a derivative of social and political relationships. A male with Lady Wisdom's qualities would be too much like a monarch."²⁶ This observation leads us to understand that the feminine attributes found in Lady Wisdom add validity and are essential to our understanding of this feminine entity.

Theologian Phillips concedes that the passage of Proverbs 8 is one of "great majesty and mystery, although one cannot be sure which of the various members of the godhead are [being] described."²⁷ Interestingly, this author has little problem, deciding that the seductress woman of Proverbs seven and the Lady Folly of Proverbs nine are definitively descriptions of women. Certainly, human women are capable of great manipulation and damage to both themselves and their counterparts. No human woman will, in her own effort, successfully live up to Lady Wisdom's description just as is true for the patriarchal understanding of the masculine. Patriarchy calls men to lead, and yet

²⁵ Ibid., 340-341.

²⁶ Ibid., 340.

²⁷ Ibid., 197.

no human man will flawlessly lead in his own effort to live into the image of God as a king, warrior, or priest.

Phillips describes the downward spiral of a man caught in the trap of the Proverbs seven seductress.

The same subtle serpent who seduced Eve taught this woman her wiles. The downward steps in that first temptation were swift—“[Eve] saw... she took... and did eat... and gave.” The serpent kept Eve’s gaze riveted on the forbidden fruit so that the look might become a lust... Choice led to a chain reaction. . . Eve the sinner became a seducer. The deadly virus was passed on.²⁸

Likewise, Philips describes the Foolish Woman of Proverbs 9.

A foolish woman is clamorous: she is simple, and knoweth nothing. She may have a pretty face, but she has an empty head. She may have physical appeal, but that is all she has. Any man forced to live with her would soon become bored with her. Her interests run to clothes and cosmetics, to fashion magazines and gossip columns, to trash and trivia.²⁹

While every woman must take to heart the warnings of the foolish and the seductive women, to focus exclusively on these descriptions will miss the author’s emphasis on the powerful presence of the feminine counterpart to the Creator. This emphasis provides insight into how women are called to bear the feminine image of God. Lady Wisdom, centerfold in the portrayal of feminine descriptions, shows us the author’s point of emphasis. Through a literary device known as chiasmic structure, the reader can determine the emphasis of the author’s message about the feminine image he is portraying.

David Dorsey, an Old Testament theologian, makes this observation. “In a symmetrical scheme . . . the center is normally the natural position of prominence,” as is

²⁸ John Phillips, *Exploring Proverbs, Vol. 1, Proverbs 1:1-19:5*. (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux, 1995), 171.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 223.

[also] true in other places such as symmetrical art.³⁰ In a chiasm, comparative ideas surround the central point of focus. Dorsey writes, “Chiastic structures frequently have a unique center item . . . The uniqueness of this location makes it suitable for emphasizing whatever is placed there.”³¹ Dorsey sees Proverbs 7 through 9 to be a chiastic structure, with Lady Wisdom as the emphasis to the reader.³²

This chiastic structuring shows us the emphasis not only about wisdom, but also about femininity. Lady Wisdom, the co-Creating, delightful counterpart of the Creator, formed before the beginning of time, brings her voice. This provides insight into images and motifs that hold a timeless, traditional view of the feminine image of God. As women in conservative Anabaptist communities, we can follow the example of these images.

The Seductress and Lady Folly provide contrast to Lady Wisdom. The author cautions the reader against the undesirable characteristics of the feminine that defies wisdom.

Four significant themes in Proverbs 8 bring substance to our discussion of biblical feminine images of God. These four themes are, 1. The Voice of Wisdom and call to “men,” 2. Lady Wisdom’s impact, 3. her origins, and finally, through a literary motif, 4. the image of wife Lady Wisdom carries as counterpart to the Creator, bringing life and shalom.

³⁰ David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 40.

³¹ Ibid., as quoted from: H. Van Dyke Parunak, “Oral Typesetting: Some Uses of Biblical Structure” *Biblica* 62 (1981): 153-68.

³² Ibid., 189.

Proverbs 8:1-11 The Voice of Wisdom

¹ Does not wisdom call,
 And understanding lift up her voice?
² On top of the heights beside the way,
 Where the paths meet, she takes her stand;
³ Beside the gates, at the opening to the city,
 At the entrance of the doors, she cries out:
⁴ “To you, O men, I call,
 And my voice is to the sons of men.
⁵ “O naive ones, understand prudence;
 And, O fools, understand wisdom.
 “Listen, for I will speak noble things;
 And the opening of my lips *will reveal* right things.
⁷ “For my mouth will utter truth;
 And wickedness is an abomination to my lips.
⁸ “All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness;
 There is nothing crooked or perverted in them.
⁹ “They are all straightforward to him who understands,
 And right to those who find knowledge.
¹⁰ “Take my instruction and not silver,
 And knowledge rather than choicest gold.
¹¹ “For wisdom is better than jewels;
 And all desirable things cannot compare with her.

The poem begins by ascertaining Lady Wisdom’s voice. She is speaking; she is crying out. This is not from a lectern or a pulpit, but “in the streets, in the market square, in the bustling opening of the city gates, in the midst of urban life... she shouts with joy, she lifts up her voice, she calls, by her spoken word, trying to catch the attention of everyone in town.”³³ Lady Wisdom calls out to men, affirming the value of her offerings with a confident voice.

This feminine counterpart of the Creator is everywhere present, not only from high and lofty places of authority, bringing to mind the rabbinic images of the Shekinah as God’s presence surrounding Israel. “Lady Wisdom cries out but does not kiss the young man impudently. She desires to persuade with the truthful content of her

³³ Kathleen M. O’Connor, *The Wisdom Literature* (Wilmington: DE: M. Glazier, 1988), 70.

speech.”³⁴ The basis for this initial aspect of the appeal concerns the truth of her words: they not merely convey mental knowledge, but more profoundly are righteous, straightforward rather than devious and deceptive.”³⁵

Lady Wisdom knows that she has a message, that it needs to be heard, and that it holds significant value. Her voice, what she brings to bear, is more valuable than material riches; therefore, the pursuit of this truthful and intuitive voice is more valuable than great riches. While this Scripture discloses the significant theme that reveals images of the wisdom of God, enmeshed in the fabric of the text are attributes of an intuitive knowing which bears a quality of wisdom often attributed to the feminine.

In a devotional presentation, a Life Counseling Ministries board member once told us about a time when he learned to appreciate his wife’s input into the affairs of their finances. Although he was a man who practiced regularly reading the Proverbs, this experience brought the significance of the feminine voice to him.

This man announced to his wife one day that he planned to buy a number of calves to raise on acreage the couple owned. His wife’s response to his announcement was, “I don’t think that you should buy those calves.”

As a successful businessperson, he felt quite irritated at this response. What does she know about raising calves? Her domain is in the kitchen. His domain is his business ventures. He proceeded to buy the calves.

Over the next successive months, the calves did not fare well. They got sick and needed medical attention. Several of them died. As the project wrapped up, there was no financial gain from the venture.

³⁴ Treier, 8.

³⁵ Ibid.

So how could his wife know that these animals would do poorly? Did she actually know? Was this a result of feminine intuition? How much significance does her opinion hold?

Womanly intuition can be discerning, but it is not magic. A woman does not have unerring discernment at all times. As the story was narrated, our storyteller did not give the reason for his wife's response. He was telling us about a time when he learned the value of seeking and listening to his wife's opinion, even when it did not involve the "kitchen."

The message is not that women always know best and men must follow whatever a woman offers. What we need to glean from this discussion is how the voices complement and harmonize with each other. *The intermingling of ideas emphasizes that both voices need to be heard to bring completion to the dialogue.* The poetry continues to note the subtle power and goodness that Lady Wisdom brings to her world. She does not rashly confront her world with her wisdom, but requires pursuit for her voice to have impact.

Proverbs 8: 12-21 The Origins of Lady Wisdom

¹² "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,
 And I find knowledge *and* discretion.
¹³ "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil;
 Pride and arrogance and the evil way
 And the perverted mouth, I hate.
¹⁴ "Counsel is mine and sound wisdom;
 I am understanding, power is mine.
¹⁵ "By me kings reign,
 And rulers decree justice.
¹⁶ "By me princes rule, and nobles,
 All who judge rightly.
¹⁷ "I love those who love me;
 And those who diligently seek me will find me.
¹⁸ "Riches and honor are with me,

Enduring wealth and righteousness.
¹⁹ “My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold,
 And my yield *better* than choicest silver.
²⁰ “I walk in the way of righteousness,
 In the midst of the paths of justice,
²¹ To endow those who love me with wealth,
 That I may fill their treasuries.

As noted earlier, Lady Wisdom is not depicted as a ruler in this passage. Lady Wisdom, though, is confident of her role and importance in rulership. Her presence and influence are of an essential necessity for the ‘king’ to be successful. Not only wealth and riches are a result of her participation, but righteousness and justice are also a result of her presence and interaction. The reader is left with no question of the role she is claiming to play in the leadership of dignitaries.

“Pride, arrogance, and the evil way” are implied results of refusing the counsel of Lady Wisdom. She acknowledges the power she holds through her understanding, absolute necessities for princes, kings, and judges to lead and “judge rightly.”

With this image of the traditional feminine, we find the necessity of both genders, and the harmony that enhances the work that they accomplish together. God’s wisdom, in this feminine form, is perfect and true. While neither gender reveals the image of God’s perfection, we see the feminine bringing a synergy to the efforts of the masculine to form the beauty and harmony of relationship in God’s kingdom.

I’m reminded of a retreat with friends, a group of both married and singles, gathered at a castle for a weekend of fun and fellowship. We were a serious, thinking kind of group that finds grappling with big ideas to be a form of ‘fun.’ Activities included teaching sessions offered by one of the professors in the group. Everyone, both men and women, participated in the discussions around the circle. Wonderful times sharing,

dialoguing, and wrestling with issues pertinent to our lives added to the richness of the time together.

Between sessions and group activities, several of the men who shared a significant friendship over the years, congregated in the sitting area of the retreat center, further discussing issues. I noted something uncanny during these informal jam sessions. Several of my single women friends and I, also enjoying thoughtful and conversation, began to gather in the perimeter of the little private circle. Although we were obviously straining to hear the conversation, there was never an attempt to include us to enter into the discussion. While the conversation was open to our hearing, the men offered no invitation for us to engage in the conversation.

Although I enjoyed our group times of rich conversation and relationship, there was an undercurrent of uneasiness stirring in me that I could not name. As the group was parting ways at the end of the weekend, I offered my warm goodbye to one of the friends who had not only presented great input, but had also participated in the public/private 'men's' group. To my horror, I burst into tears. It was an awkward moment for both of us, his response being, "I don't know what you want." I did not either.

It took me several years to recognize that what was stirring was the lack of invitation into the more casual discussions, between planned sessions. Let me quickly acknowledge that I do not believe I need to be in the center of all conversations. It was obvious, though, that we as single women were 'invited' to listen in from the periphery, but not to be active participants in the discussion. There was a 'men only' quality to the casual discussion time that the single women, by intuitive gut sense, knew not to interrupt.

In our traditional Anabaptist social events, gender segregation often characterizes our casual gatherings. For some, this makes the gathering more ‘safe.’ The idea driving the segregation is to avoid improper behavior between men and women. Wise and truthful assessment of our heart is always necessary for healthy relationships, but an over-emphasis on gender segregation can actually create an opposite effect. An unhealthy suspicion about the opposite gender can create unhealthy relationships. It can create strained relationships that lead to a heightened interest, sometimes creating the “stealing the forbidden cookie from the cookie jar” effect. What one can ‘steal’ becomes an unhealthy way of filling the relational needs of the heart.

It is significant to note that Lady Wisdom “calls” and brings her voice, but she must be pursued to be found. While one can easily find her in the crossways of life, she does not exert demand or force to be heard. One must “diligently seek” her to find the wisdom she brings. The masculine, the ‘other,’ must seek, must pursue this counterpart of wisdom in order to find her.

As conservative Anabaptists, I believe we can grow in discovering new ways for healthy, meaningful, casual conversations between genders. Lady Wisdom provides insight into the goodness and beauty of interaction that brings the voices of both genders to the table.

As one who has participated in settings outside of the conservative Anabaptist setting, I have found that my voice *is* pursued and valued in these settings. A part of the grief that I was experiencing in the goodness of this meaningful retreat with friends from my community was the lack of affirmation for involvement in a more casual setting. I experience my voice and input pursued outside of my community in ways that it is not at

home. Lady Wisdom provides motivation for finding ways to improve healthy discussion and dialogue that brings the voices of both genders to the table.

The strong proclamations that we have heard Lady Wisdom make thus far in our discussion, leads us to ask about her credentials that justify such claims. The poem now moves to the veracity of these claims.

Proverbs 8:22-31 Lady Wisdom as Co-Creator

²² “The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way,
 Before His works of old.
²³ “From everlasting I was established,
 From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth.
²⁴ “When there were no depths I was brought forth,
 When there were no springs abounding with water.
²⁵ “Before the mountains were settled,
 Before the hills I was brought forth;
²⁶ While He had not yet made the earth and the fields,
 Nor the first dust of the world.
²⁷ “When He established the heavens, I was there,
 When He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep,
²⁸ When He made firm the skies above,
 When the springs of the deep became fixed,
²⁹ When He set for the sea its boundary
 So that the water would not transgress His command,
 When He marked out the foundations of the earth;
³⁰ Then I was beside Him, *as* a master workman;
 And I was daily *His* delight, Rejoicing always before Him,
³¹ Rejoicing in the world, His earth,
 And *having* my delight in the sons of men

“I was there,” “I was beside Him,” Lady Wisdom declares of her place at the side of the Creator at the Creation of the world.³⁶ This feminine entity was “brought forth” before the beginning of time.

Writer Kathleen M. O’Conner makes these deductions of Lady Wisdom.

³⁶ Proverbs 8: 27, 30.

“In this poem the Wisdom Woman does not act alone. She is not God, but God’s companion.” . . .”This poem depicts a puzzling mutuality in her relationship with God. She is ever with him, joining in his work, imprinting it with her artistry, and living with God in mutual delight.”³⁷

This feminine companion or counterpart is there at the Creation, observing all that the Creator is doing.

“It is these origins before the birth of the world which establish the Wisdom Woman’s authority. In the ancient world, the older the religious figures and traditions were believed to be, the more claim they had to reveal hidden truths. She is older than even the oldest thing we know, the earth itself. By placing her birth before creation, the author gives her unquestionable authority to speak the truth. This Wisdom Woman is an ancient power to be reckoned with.”³⁸

Lady Wisdom reveals her origins as being before the creation; before the beginning of time. She was there, observing the Creator doing his work of bringing the earth into being. This claim substantiates her knowledge of how things have come to be and how they work. “Wisdom makes clear that God originated their association. She describes God as the subject who acts and herself as the one acted upon, but leaves mysterious exactly *how* God initiated their relationship.”³⁹

The translation of the Hebrew word, ‘*amon*,’ which means, I was at God’s side. . . locates her with respect to God . . .”but leaves her exact role, like her origins, obscure.”⁴⁰ Numerous suggestions abound. For some, “architect” or “artist,” lends credence, while

³⁷O’Connor, *The Wisdom Literature*, 66.

³⁸ Ibid, 67.

³⁹ Christine Elizabeth Yoder, *Proverbs*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009) 94.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 96. To read several of the multiple discussion of the considerations of the Hebrew word meanings, refer to this author, as well as, Clifford, Richard J. 1999. *Proverbs: a Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 99-101; Farmer, Kathleen Anne. 1991. *Who Knows What Is Good?: a Commentary on the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 52-56.

for others “infant” or “darling child” is considered.⁴¹ “Confident and “counselor,” is another thought of a writer “based on similar sounding words in languages closely related to Hebrew.”⁴²

The concept of the ‘rib’ is an image that would appear to lend substantial insight into this discussion. In the discovery of Lady Wisdom’s origins, the passage blends elements of creation with gender sensitive structure. This brings to mind the Creator’s fashioning of Eve from Adam’s rib, which would show us that God established gender constructs “in His image” before the Biblical creation account. Likewise, according to this Proverb poetry, the feminine engendered Wisdom came into being. Lady Wisdom ‘was brought forth,’ before Yahweh creates the world to be His counterpart and co-creator as He designed the world in which we live. While the text is not clear as to Wisdom’s role at creation, what is clearly implied is that the Creator “brought forth” this feminine entity as co-creator before He created the world.

A chiastic arrangement of the poem again adds insight into the themes of delight and rejoicing that characterize the last verses of this section. Wisdom was daily His, the Creators, delight, rejoicing before Him, rejoicing in the world, taking delight in the sons of men. “Wisdom enjoys being with God and her position of honor. Her joy is especially intense as she watches God create.”⁴³

Theologian Delitzsch sees Lady Wisdom’s purpose designed by the Creator as “artistic performances.” The description of her is very suitable because, God brought her

⁴¹ Farmer, 55.

⁴² William McKane, 1970. *Proverbs, a New Approach*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 357-58.

⁴³ Clifford, 97.

forth, to join into His creation of the world. The passage now answers the question of what God had in view for Lady Wisdom's separate existence. "It was she who transferred the creative thoughts originally existing... set in motion by His Creative order." He sees Lady Wisdom impacting Creation's effectiveness, artistically ...mediating the cause... which the divine creative activity made use of."⁴⁴

Ralph Wardlaw states it like this: "Wisdom was the constant companion or associate of all God's plans and all their execution,--inseparable from God in all he purposed and in all he did; and "was daily his delight."⁴⁵ He goes on to describe this synergy between the Creator and Lady Wisdom: "As the products of divine power and wisdom successively appeared on each of these days, the almighty and all-wise Creator delighted in the manifestation of his own perfections."⁴⁶ Through her important contributions, "Wisdom, by her counsels, when carried into execution, advances the glory of God ... there being nothing in the results of her counsels of which she has any reason to be ashamed."⁴⁷

"It is not good for man to be alone,"⁴⁸ God says, in the context of the creation story. We see the Creator acting according to His own design and plan. This feminine counterpart brings deep joy and delight to the Creator as they co-labor in Creation.

⁴⁴Franz Delitzsch and M. G. Easton. 1950. *Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon*. Vol. I. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1950) 191.

⁴⁵ Ralph Wardlaw, 1981. *Lectures on the Book of Proverbs*. Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 203.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 203.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 204.

⁴⁸ Genesis 2:18.

The power of feminine affirmation rings loudly through this poetry. It resounds of heavenly scenes found in Revelation where the joy of heaven surrounds the throne of God. “New Jerusalem, as a bride adorned for her husband” participates in this scene of everlasting life in the final scenes of Time.⁴⁹ This touch of heaven shadows the creation of the world, the synergy and harmony of these divine companions calling to those in God’s creation to participate.

Harmonious relationship characterizes the divine interplay of the Creator and Lady Wisdom.⁵⁰ This picture of harmony ignites a sense of shalom as this feminine counterpart participates, affirms, and delights in the Creator and His work.

One finds this engendered theme of harmonious delight and celebration threaded through the Scriptures. King David’s prayer worships Yahweh as he envisions Israel, His bride, redeemed and taking her place in the temple that David’s son would build.⁵¹ King Solomon reenacts this scene of worship at the dedication of the temple⁵² Prophetically, the prophet Isaiah sees Israel as the radiant bride with a gloriously beautiful crown, “married” to her bridegroom,⁵³ a scene filled with utter delight.

The final act of Scripture repeats this theme of a beautiful bride, prepared and pursued by her bridegroom, “new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.”⁵⁴ These images of engendered,

⁴⁹ Revelation 21:3,9.

⁵⁰ Proverbs 8:30b, 31.

⁵¹ II Samuel 7: 22-29.

⁵² I Kings 8:33-43.

⁵³ Isaiah 62: 1-5.

⁵⁴ Revelation 21:2.

harmonious delight in Scripture form a central theme. Can we support the image of wife for Lady Wisdom from our study of Proverbs 8? The last section of the proverb supports and affirms that image.

Proverbs 8:32-36 Lady Wisdom as Wife

³² “Now therefore, *O* sons, listen to me,
For blessed are they who keep my ways.

³³ “Heed instruction and be wise,
And do not neglect *it*.

³⁴ “Blessed is the man who listens to me,
Watching daily at my gates,
Waiting at my doorposts.

³⁵ “For he who finds me finds life
And obtains favor from the LORD.

³⁶ “But he who sins against me injures himself;
All those who hate me love death.”

The final section of the poem of Proverbs 8 confirms the image of wife for Lady Wisdom’s identity as the feminine aspect of Yahweh’s image, through the repetition of a poetic motif. “He who finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord,” immediately draws one’s mind to a similarly constructed statement in Proverbs 18. “He who find ‘me,’ Lady Wisdom declares, finds life, equating herself to the ‘wife’ that a good man finds in the later chapter.⁵⁵ Donald Treier intertwines the wisdom themes of the chapter with the metaphor of wife.

We should not simply listen to Wisdom by studying, but more holistically pursue her via personal relationship; study must therefore be prayerful, pursuing covenant fellowship with God.

The metaphorical—and literal—importance of marriage registers in a parallel between 8:35 and 18:22. In the former, finding Wisdom obtains “favor from the

⁵⁵ Proverbs 18:35

Lord”; in the latter, finding a good wife does so. The relational context of pursuing Wisdom is frequent and consistent.⁵⁶

The Genesis passage draws one’s mind to where the Lord God declares, “It is not good for the man to be alone.”⁵⁷ Both of these passages affirm the necessary hearing of the feminine voice of discernment and wisdom. In the man’s daily life, in his dwelling, this feminine voice brings life. It is not optional, but critical for there to be favor and life for him.

The apostle Peter writes instructions reminiscent of this Biblical mandate. He instructs husbands to “honor their wives” so that their prayers are not hindered.⁵⁸

Lady Wisdom and the Traditional Feminine

As noted earlier, juxtaposed between the Seductress of Proverbs 7 and Lady Folly of Proverbs 9 we find the feminine entity of Lady Wisdom of Proverbs 8, the counterpart/co-creator with the Creator, as He forms the world, mystifying theologians while calling to men to hear her critical message. The themes from this passage help to make sense and bring a lot of insight to women living in traditional communities. Women bring the feminine counterpart to the masculine, offering “life” and “favor from the Lord” when she is sought and found.

The themes we find in Proverbs 8 bring clarity to how women play a critical role in displaying the image of God through our study of the feminine image of Lady Wisdom. A closer look at the themes of voice, pursuit, creativity, and relationship will

⁵⁶ Treier, 9.

⁵⁷ Genesis 2:18a.

⁵⁸ I Peter 3:7.

deepen our understanding. Lady Wisdom entices us to life-giving fulfillment as we follow her example and direction.

Voice

Having voice, distinctly feminine voice, is a critical element that the traditional feminine requires. Although Lady Wisdom does not speak from a lectern or pulpit, it does not weaken or disqualify the message she brings to her world. From a Jewish perspective, Rabbi Shumley Boteach merges the theme of the feminine Shekinah and voice in this way:

We must not misconstrue woman's more private role within Judaism as secondary. Those who have spiritual fulfillment do not need to shout it from the pulpits of the synagogues any more than those who are truly in love need to demonstrate it in public places. Subtle dignity and quiet spirituality are far more formidable than anything overtly aggressive or physical. True religious piety and holiness do not holler. They speak in a strong and steady voice, resonating from within.⁵⁹

Dana Crowley Jack addresses the importance of feminine voice and how its loss in women leads to depression. Her words echo themes from Proverbs 8 that we have been considering. "Voice is an indicator of self. Speaking one's feelings and thoughts is part of creating, maintaining, and recreating one's authentic self."⁶⁰ Jack explores the impact of the loss of feminine voice.

Based on her experience of working with depressed women, Jack names three elements of loss, which affect the feminine soul. "First, as the women present it, the loss of self coincides with a loss of voice in relationship." ... "Second, we notice women lose

⁵⁹ Shmuley Boteach, *Judaism for Everyone: Renewing Your Life through the Vibrant Lessons of Jewish Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 183.

⁶⁰ Dana Crowley Jack, *Silencing the Self: Women and Depression* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 32.

themselves as they try to fit into an image provided by someone else—husband, parental teachings, the culture.” ... “Third, in their narratives, the women indicate that they refrain from speech not only to avoid conflict but because they fear they may be wrong.”⁶¹

One could propose that Lady Wisdom, the feminine entity of the Creator, addresses these issues while embracing a traditional position of the feminine. The voice of Lady Wisdom is confident of its offerings, declaring, affirming and blending with the Creator, creating a synergistic harmony. She speaks in a distinct, although mysterious, voice that is steady and courageous, confident of what she brings to bear in her world.

The theme of voice resonates in the counseling office. Often I hear words like, “I just need someone to hear my perspective.” Verbalizing aloud helps one to ‘hear,’ thus helping one to make wise choices.

As women, our voices can become loud and demanding when we do not feel heard. I believe this is why the woman’s movement is often off-putting. Increased volume mixed with anger does not improve the quality of one’s message or the possibility of the receiver to hear it. The Scripture warns us in other places to temper our voices to allow the Holy Spirit to be the gatekeeper over our mouths, so that we speak words of life and not destruction. This does not mean, though, to “shut up and put up.”

Ultimately, bringing our voice before the Lord opens our heart to re-envision our scope of perspective. The story of Hannah in First Samuel 1 shows us a desperate woman, misunderstood by her husband and scorned by a rivaling wife. Even the Priest Eli misinterprets her as being drunk while observing her passionate cry to the God of Israel.

⁶¹Ibid, 32, 33.

“No, my lord, I am a woman oppressed in spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have poured out my soul before the Lord. . . I have spoken until now out of my great concern and provocation.”⁶² We are allowed glimpses of the beauty of Hannah’s heart cry.

Hannah’s depression lifted. As she left the tabernacle, after pouring out her heart to God and receiving Eli’s blessing, she was no longer sad. Naming her desperation with persistence opened her heart to the Lord, changing her.

Pursuit

This feminine counterpart of the Creator, while confident and courageous, requires pursuit in order to be found.⁶³ This call for pursuit in no way affects the importance of Lady Wisdom’s voice of wisdom. Her poise and confidence are not dependent upon pursuit, but are required for those who know the need of her relationship. In romantic relationships, we call this being coy. Waiting requires a patience and quiet heart. It is so easy to minimize one’s feminine voice by impatience and demand in any kind of relationship. Waiting bears fruit when a woman finds a way to invite pursuit, and then waits quietly... before the Lord.

Scripture instructs us to ask, seek, and knock, bringing our requests to the Lord. Like Hannah, a quiet heart knows where to bring the desperation of the heart. While those around us may not understand, we have a ‘safe place’ to bring the cries from the trenches of our hearts. It opens our heart’s door to the Lord’s inner transforming work.

⁶² I Samuel 1: 15,16.

⁶³ Proverbs 8:17, 35

Creativity

The day awakened with blue-sky perfection. Crisp, cool air kissed the pristine lawn gently rolling to the mirrored blue pond. A pair of swans lazily swam in the water, occasionally touching beaks to form a perfect heart-shaped pattern between them. Dawn had dreamed about this day for her whole life. She pinched herself to check if this was reality or only one of those dreams from the past.

Dawn suggested a moment when she and Bob could meet in private, an intimate moment for them before her father walked her down the aisle. Bob loved the mystery and anticipation that this moment would bring, a culmination of their dating, a prelude to saying their vows to pledge their love to each other.

Dawn discovered a small private garden on the day that she and Bob finalized the arrangements for their wedding venue. It was the perfect place for their meeting. Dawn had smuggled in a few memoirs from their dating days, adding flowers and Bob's favorite thirst-quencher to charm their secluded meeting place.

There is probably nothing that displays feminine creativity better than the details arranged by a bride for her wedding day. Little girls dream of the day they will walk down the aisle to commit their lives to their beloved. While traditional conservative weddings may not include all the 'pomp and circumstance' of more contemporary weddings, the aura of mystery and excitement electrifies the air with expectation.

Israel is the metaphorical bride of God her Maker, her Redeemer. Isaiah announces that God will not give up on Jerusalem until everyone sees and recognizes her

as a jeweled queen – a bride.⁶⁴ Israel had prostituted herself with the other nations and experienced destructive ‘rape’ by her enemies.⁶⁵

God’s picture of the redemption of Israel, this prostituted, unfaithful lover that He formed and desired for His own, will one day participate in the wedding of all weddings, when God reveals to the world His faithfulness as a bridegroom.⁶⁶ It is no small wonder that gender issues carry such significance in our lives.

Just as the Shekinah reveals feminine images of God, which we as women are called to carefully reflect, so God faithfully honors and redeems the design of himself in which we have been made.

Creativity involves far more than ones wedding day. My friend Frieda, who has suffered deeply in her failed marriage, has learned to listen to the whispers of the Spirit, finding a special touch when it comes to creating beautiful places, places indulgent in the beauty of nature through the design of her home and garden. It is in these places of beauty that one’s heart is invited to rest, to contemplate God’s creation, and moves the heart to sing.

The feminine touch that creates homes of beauty and grace are so reminiscent of Lady Wisdom. Places of beauty enlarge ones heart and invite us to worship. Creating beauty takes time, effort, and commitment to the loveliness of order in our world.

Modesty and Feminine Hidden Treasure.

Modesty is a theme that surrounds the concept of ‘hidden treasure’ and the feminine. Our Westernized culture has the capacity to goggle and ogle many things,

⁶⁴ Isaiah 62: 3, 4.

⁶⁵ Jeremiah 39:8.

⁶⁶ Isaiah 62: 5b.

violating boundaries once considered private. Wendy Shalit has written an important treatise that exposes our cultural disrespect toward the hidden treasure of femininity. She writes,

The sexual revolution seems to have failed mostly because it ignored the differences between the sexes—specifically, the importance of female modesty. When it failed, when women began to discover that they were uniquely compromised by a sexual free-for-all, there was an attempt to restore order. Women’s liberation may have been a valiant attempt to restore that order, but it, too failed because it was reluctant to consider the importance of natural modesty, and held that all differences we observed were the result of oppression. Hence all their ways to restore order, such as through sexual harassment legislation, have been like trying to put a Band-Aid over an amputated limb.⁶⁷

Editorial writer George F. Will, reviews Shalit’s book, pointing out that she has “been accused of prudery ever since she has published a philippic against co-ed bathrooms at her college.” He goes on to quote her response, “Modesty is prudery’s true opposite, because it admits that one *can* be moved and issues a specific invitation for one man to try.”⁶⁸

Many passages in the epistles of the New Testament Scriptures call women to present themselves modestly.⁶⁹ It is interesting to note that as with women in traditional Christian communities, clothing also identifies traditional Jewish women.⁷⁰ Clothing choices identify one’s allegiance and identity to a community. Through this study of the Shekinah and the feminine image of God, we find that the keeping of a modest approach to one’s dress enhances our desirability through the appeal of mystery.

⁶⁷ Wendy Shalit, *A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue* (New York: Free Press, 1999), 139.

⁶⁸ George F. Will, “Modesty Is Sexy. Really. Wendy Shalit, Demure Counterrevolutionary Urges Women to Form a ‘cartel of Virtue,’” *Newsweek*, February 1, 1999, 74.

⁶⁹ I Timothy 2:9, I Peter 3:3.

⁷⁰ Yadgar, *Gender, Religion, and Feminism*, 360.

It is hard to miss the connection between modesty and the behind-the-veil Shekinah study we are pursuing. Modesty is not only an issue of the clothing one wears. The apostle Peter validates in women the “hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.”⁷¹ A courageous, gentle, nurturing heart brings a life-giving presence to those it encounters.

Questions for Personal Reflection and Group Discussion

1. The chapter material described a synergy between the Creator and Lady Wisdom. Describe the characteristics of the ‘dance’ between them. What would this kind of dance look like in your marriage? In other, close relationships? What new things need to happen for this dance to become more graceful?
2. What is the value in the pursuit of Lady Wisdom? Why might that increase the effectiveness of her voice?
3. Name the ways that Lady Wisdom invites pursuit.
4. If you have struggled with depression in the past, how does the idea of having voice have significance to your depression? Describe ways that you shut down or minimize your voice. Why? Ponder ways you could find to bring your heart’s concerns with honor and respect.
5. Ponder and describe ways that you could take your creativity in your home to the next level?
6. Ponder the idea of modesty and feminine hidden treasure. How would your practices of modesty change if you were convinced of the value of hidden treasure?

⁷¹ I Peter 3:4.

Chapter 9

Mary Magdalene Commissioned to Tell the Greatest News Ever Told

It must have been cool and dark the morning Mary Magdalene ran to the garden tomb. Mary Magdalene and other women had watched while the body of Jesus was carried and laid in the sepulcher just before the first hour of the Sabbath. As she walked carrying spices to anoint the body, Mary Magdalene pondered how she could roll the large stone away that covered the entrance of the tomb.

In Luke's account, there were several women going together, while John's gospel highlights Mary Magdalene journeying to the tomb. Luke reports that these women had followed Joseph of Arimathea, who had taken Jesus body from the soldiers, to see where he was taking the body. It seems John's account focuses on Mary's relationship to Jesus.

As Mary arrived at the tomb, she was amazed to find the stone already rolled away from the door. Shock and horror struck her heart as she peered into the tomb. The tomb was empty!

Running quickly, Mary finds the disciples to report to them that the tomb was empty. John's gospel offers many details about how Peter and John ran to the tomb with the women. John, who could run faster, arrived at the empty tomb first, Peter following behind. Peter entered the tomb, carefully noting the grave clothing lying inside the tomb. The face cloth was rolled up, and not lying with the linen wrappings that had been around the body of Jesus.

Gender seems to play a role in the responses of Peter, John and Mary. Perplexed, Peter and John leave the tomb. The gospel of John clearly reports that the disciples still did not understand that Jesus would rise from the dead, even though He told them on

several occasions that it would happen. They were confused. Were they afraid to be found at the empty tomb, fearing they would be accused of stealing the body? Were they afraid of the Roman soldiers? In spite of her fear and tears, Mary stayed in the garden.

True to the feminine heart, often more emotionally connected, Mary is crying. Grief and sadness seem to overwhelm her. Not only had Jesus died by the cruel death of crucifixion, but now also, his body was gone.

Mary had been so convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. In an amazing encounter, Jesus had delivered her of seven demons. Mary's whole personhood was an amazing transformation of life and health since that deliverance day. Jesus was the most incredible man she had ever met. Her tears flowed in the agony of her grief and confusion.

She looked again inside the tomb. Amazed, she saw two angels in white sitting at the head and foot of where Jesus' body had laid. The angels asked her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" Before she could answer their questions, she turned around to see a man standing behind her. It was Jesus, but she did not recognize Him. Jesus asks Mary the same question, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? It was when Jesus called her name that Mary recognized Him.

There she was, Mary, a woman, overcome by the tears of grief and confusion. In love that Jesus was not offended or hindered by Mary's tears. In fact, it was while Mary was crying that He approached her. Her tears did not change Jesus' mind about Mary's identity or her ability to be a significant player in the revelation of His resurrection.

I sense Mary's joy and desperation as she ran to greet Jesus. It appears that she ran to grab him, clutching Him with an energy that said, 'don't leave me again! I can't

take it. I need You to stay here.’ In that moment, Mary did not understand anything but the fact that Jesus was there! The unbelievable was true! Jesus was alive!

I would have seemed only reasonable to Mary that the disciples and the women needed Jesus. He was alive again! He was the Messiah. Now Jesus could set up His kingdom with the powerful message of love and peace. He would bring them deliverance and freedom from their oppressors. It felt like she could not live without Him.

I am often like Mary in that moment. I am amazed at God’s presence and intervention in my life. I assume I know what the Lord’s up to and I want to require of the Lord what seems the absolute best for me from my perspective. It’s so encouraging that Mary’s inaccurate desire to hold on to Jesus doesn’t seem to change His belief in her or the message she was capable of bearing.

Jesus gives Mary a firm command to her response. “Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.” Mary’s demanding energy does not change His further instructions to her. He believes in her voice, in her capacity to present this unbelievable message.

Jesus’ words are amazing words of affirmation, “Go to My brethren, and say to them, “I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.” Jesus commissioned, Mary, a woman, to bring the message of the resurrection to His disciples! So many questions loom in one’s mind. Why did Jesus not reveal Himself in the garden when Peter and John were there? Why did He wait until after they left to go home? Why did He entrust the message of His resurrection to a woman? Why did He instruct Mary to tell the men?

A New Testament professor under which I studied at a secular university pointed out the gravity of Jesus' appearance and commission to Mary. This revelation of the resurrection by a woman, in a historical way, actually becomes a proof of its veracity. In the Jewish/Roman culture of that time, a woman's words were not valued or considered credible. No one fabricating this story would ever say that a woman had told it. Through this inverted sort of way, the fact that Jesus entrusts Mary with the news of His resurrection actually lends credibility to the account.

Jesus makes astounding statements about His Father, and His relationship to Mary and the disciples. Not only was Jesus ascending to His Father, but also He declared that God was Mary's Father and the disciples' Father as well. Jesus was declaring Himself a brother to Mary and the disciples. He was declaring them now to be in the same family. Mary and the disciples belonged to Him and His Father and Jesus belonged to them. Jesus resurrection had reunited the family of God together again!

This account in John 20 brings to my mind our study of Lady Wisdom of Proverbs 8. Mary Magdalene becomes a central figure in the revelation of the resurrection of Jesus. She becomes a co-player in the Father's revelation. Mary's voice first announces the news of Jesus' resurrection.

We are not told why Jesus chose to reveal Himself first to Mary. It is interesting to note that Eve, the mother of all living, took the forbidden fruit, ate of it first, and gave it to Adam. One could propose that Jesus' commission of Mary Magdalene to tell the news of the resurrection first acted to redeem Eve's error. Eve had made a grave error in taking the forbidden fruit and offering it to Adam. Mary Magdalene now carried 'the fruit,' the message of redemption to the disciples. Through this divinely appointed

instruction, the Fall... and Eve's error, were redeemed by Jesus. The resurrection reversed the curse of death from the Fall, offering redemption to all believers.

Questions for Personal Reflection and Group Discussion

1. Describe what it would be like for you to experience meeting Jesus in the garden as Mary Magdalene did.
2. Consider why Mary Magdalene and the women were taking spices to the tomb to embalm the body. What does this indicate about their relationship with him?
3. Jesus came to Mary Magdalene while she was weeping. We believe the Scripture teaches that Jesus is the same "yesterday, today, and forever." Ponder and write about what this could mean for you when you are overcome with grief and fear.
4. Describe how Jesus related to Mary's reaction when she realized He was alive.
5. Ponder the fact that Jesus instructed Mary to take the message of the resurrection to the disciples. Write out your thoughts.
 - How does that impact your view of your own voice, the messages of your heart?
 - Spend time pondering what you believe about your voice. Write out your thoughts.
 - How may this study help you to find courage to bring your thoughts and concerns to those in your world?
 - How will it change what you believe about your voice?
 - How will it change what you share with others? Why?

Chapter 10 The Power of a Spiritually Disciplined Life

As the last notes of music faded at the end of the time of prayer and reflection that concludes our weekly woman's group, several of the women were lingering, savoring the moments of calm and quiet. As the group leader, I posed the question, "What is this time like for you?" as the participants stirred to leave. "Can you connect with the message of a song that's unfamiliar to you?" Several of the women nodded with affirmation. Margaret popped up with a response. "I thought," "Hmmm, *He is here, He is near us,*" quoting the words of the song we had just listened to. Suddenly she added, "But 'no,' He is not here!" wrinkling her nose in confusion. The thought struck her suddenly. Margaret realized she was not certain that God's presence was with us in the moment.

Even for those raised in traditional communities with regular church attendance, God's presence is not imminently obvious. Often, women have learned, through their relationship with men, that like their father, God seems distant. He often appears absent to our human sense of knowing. This suggests how many find it difficult to connect with the reality of the living presence of Jesus. I venture to say that until we grow in experiencing the truth of who God is, we cannot "know" more deeply, God's presence, or who we are to Him.

The feminine Shekinah image that we have been studying offers insight into the more hidden, behind-the-scene image of God. It actually helps one spiritually visualize the reality of God's presence when He seems absent. It requires focused time and effort to attune oneself to the Lord. He invites us to come boldly into His presence.

Through my personal journey, the value of spiritual formation disciplines such as Scripture, prayer, silence, solitude, meditation, and journaling offer me a growing

awareness of the Lord's presence. These disciplines take time, not only in the activity of them, but also in the development of a consistent routine. Active times of spiritual connection and reflection set the tone of the day, often best when practiced in the first waking hours of the day.

Dallas Willard defines the disciplines for the spiritual life as “time-tested activities consciously undertaken by us as men or women to allow our spirit ever-increasing sway over our embodied selves.”⁷² The discipline of contemplative prayer not only allows ones spirit opportunity to connect with God's presence in moments of silence and ‘centering,’ but it also helps to form a focused awareness of God's presence that is always around us.

This is not the same as religion. Religion leans on a measurable standard to establish a sense of right and wrong. Spiritual disciplines are practices that focus on building a personal relationship with living presence the Lord, with Jesus.

Margaret, the young woman in our opening narrative was born and raised in a highly structured conservative church community. Her emotionally unavailable father, a prominent, busy, itinerate pastor, left his daughter with profound internal feelings of insecurity. Critical and condemning of her life choices, even in her adult years as a single woman, Margaret struggled with issues of anxiety and depression.

For Margaret, an understanding that her life revealed something important about the image of God seemed like a foreign concept. Constant criticism eroded her sense of personhood, leaving her anxious and fragmented. In this chapter, we will consider the spiritual disciplines of contemplative prayer, meditative reading of the Scriptures

⁷²Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. (San Francisco: Harper, 1988), 86.

sometimes known as *lectio divina*, and the practice of the prayer of examine. These disciplines provide a foundation for connection with the Father's presence through prayer, Scripture, and an open heart of gratitude and confession, daily before the Lord.

Contemplative Prayer

Adele Calhoun describes contemplative prayer as “a receptive posture of openness toward God . . . a way of waiting with a heart awake to God's presence” . . . [which] “intentionally trusts and rests in the Holy Spirit deep in our spirit.”⁷³ This form of sitting quietly before the lord “involves sitting with God in intentional inward and outward silence, with the goal of yielding to the Holy Spirit's work in us.”⁷⁴ This form of quiet prayer, in this manner trains our minds to focus, “to bring every thought into the captivity of Christ.”

This kind of silence and solitude presents challenges to keep one's mind focused. In the bustle of our scheduled lives, it can seem as if we are wasting our time. Are minds will often drift and need refocusing. One may suddenly feel uncertain of the Lord's presence with us as we learn to focus on the eternal, spiritual reality instead of depending on our empirical way of knowing.

This was my experience when I began to practice this discipline. This discipline can surface many questions. I was not aware of how much I avoided conscious, direct focus on the Lord's presence with me. With practice, one can experience a growing awareness of God's presence, moving and guiding one's life.

⁷³Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 211.

⁷⁴Anthony Campolo and Mary Albert. Darling, *The God of Intimacy and Action: Reconnecting Ancient Spiritual Practices, Evangelism, and Justice* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 131.

Lectio Divina, Contemplative Reading of the Scriptures

Reading Scripture in a contemplative manner assists one in moving from the intellect to entering into the narrative of story to hear the message written ‘beneath the words.’ A short passage of Scripture often works best so one can focus on all the details presented in the passage.

Reading the passage over several times allows one to see and experience thoughts that may not have surfaced the first time. Focusing on each of your five senses aids one in entering into the narrative, to join in the activity it describes. What do you hear as you read the passage? What do you see? Smell? Feel? Ask the Lord to reveal anything from the passage that is a part of His message to you today.

In the stories of the Gospels, Jesus invites us ‘to be’ the people to whom He is speaking. Although the context of the story is in another time and culture, themes of Jesus love, presence, forgiveness and blessing are for each of our hearts to claim.

The passage in Mark 10 offers us a beautiful example of this internalizing of the message of the narrative. Jesus rebukes the disciples for sending children away, and then He invites the children to come, takes them up in His arms, and blesses them. When someone faces the memory of rejection in childhood, this passage, in vivid color, invites the wounded child-part of the heart to come to Jesus for blessing and care. It is in the presence of Jesus that we find healing and restoration.

The Prayer of Examine

The prayer of examine offers one a meaningful discipline that keeps our spirits attune with the Lord’s care and forgiveness. This involves sitting quietly at the end of the

day, reflecting on the activities and relationships we have encountered throughout the day.

First, this discipline invites one to recount the blessings of the day. Where did I find evidence of the Father's presence with me? It is with gratitude that we name our awareness of God's love, protection, and blessing, to count and record them.

Next, we quietly seek to know ways that we fell short of honoring the Lord in our lives during the day. Honestly facing our weaknesses and failures allows us to pour these needs out before the Lord. Through honest confession, we experience the Father's forgiveness and love for us, even in our weaknesses. We can feel clean and free as we retire from the day, embracing the Father's presence with us.

These meaningful practices teach our hearts to claim our deepest identity before God. The Shekinah image of God brings personal context to our feminine ways of walking with the Lord. The consistent practice of spiritual disciplines takes effort, but pays enormous dividends, assisting spiritual realities to become a vital part of our living reality.

Questions for Personal Reflection and Group Discussion

1. Ponder and write about ways that you experience the Lord's presence in your life. Think creatively!
2. Write about thoughts and feelings that the word 'discipline' evokes.
3. On a scale of 1-10, how interested are you in practicing a new spiritual discipline?
 1- No interest 5- kind of interested 10-very interested

If your interest is low, what would help you move to the next level?

4. Name the biggest challenges you face to be consistent in practicing spiritual disciplines.
5. Which discipline described in the chapter appeals to you as a good starting place? Why?

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