

Letting the entire body of Christ speak : moving beyond the female / male binary in liturgy

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Letting the Entire Body of Christ Speak

Moving Beyond the Female/Male Binary in Liturgy

STEPHANIE A. BUDWEY

Introduction

The image of the Body of Christ was integral to Virgil Michael and the Liturgical Movement; it was formative, encouraging mutual dependence and care for all those who made up the Body. The cultural understanding of sex and gender – what it means to be ‘female’ and ‘male’ – is challenged by the presence of intersex individuals (those who are born with “mixed or indeterminate genital attributes”)¹ in the Body of Christ. Their presence in the Body of Christ forces Christians to realise that the “image of God is not reflected more perfectly in some”.² Adam Tice’s (b. 1979) hymn *Quirky, Queer, and Wonderful* (2014) emphasises the great diversity and interconnectedness that is the Body of Christ.³ Each and every member can reveal the face of God, a face that is beyond representations of gender. How might the liturgy need to be re-examined in order to be certain that the hymns sung, the rites used and the images of God employed actually speak to and reflect the entire Body of Christ, not just one limited binary vision of it?

- 1 I prefer to use this terminology over “ambiguous” genitalia. The phrase comes from Judith Butler, “Doing Justice to Someone. Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality”, in: *QLQ. A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 7, No. 4 (2001), pp. 621–636, here p. 625.
- 2 Susannah Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ. Intersex Conditions and Christian Theology*, London: Equinox, 2010, p. 234.
- 3 Adam M. L. Tice, *Claim the Mystery. 50 More Hymn Texts*, Chicago: GIA Publications, 2015, pp. 72f.

Quirky, Queer, and Wonderful

Refrain

Quirk - y, queer, and won - der - ful, dis -

tinct, u - nique, and odd— all of our hu -

man - i - ty re - veals the face of God.

Verses

1. No "nor - mal" can en - com - pass or
 2. From Je - sus we learn rid - dles; he
 3. To Pe - ter, God pre - sent - ed un -
 4. In Christ the false di - vi - sions of
 5. The man - y parts that form us each

com - pre - hend the range of all the kinds of
 said the last are first. He tweaked re - ceived re -
 touch - a - ble cui - sine and said, "Do not call
 gen - der, class, and race, can nev - er sep - a -
 serve a diff - rent role. In Christ, we are one

Am D G C D G D.C.

peo - ple that God cre - at - ed strange!
 li - gion with roles that he re - versed.
 dirt - y what I de - clare is clean."
 rate us from God's a - bun - dant grace.
 bod y, made ho - ly, good, and whole.

Text: Adam M. L. Tice, © 2014, GIA Publications, Inc.

Tune: ROYAL OAK, 7 6 7 6 with refrain; English melody; adapt. by Martin Shaw, 1875–1958

Quirky, Queer, and Wonderful, by Adam M. L. Tice

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Moving Beyond “Add Female and Stir”

While it is often said that God is “beyond gender”, gendered representations of God are still often seen in art and in liturgical texts which “vividly display cultural assumptions about ‘normative’ gender roles.”⁴ There is – and continues to be – a history of privileging male imagery to describe God. There have also been many texts recently written that speak to the maternal traits of God, yet it is simply not enough to ‘add female and stir’. One strategy, then, is to acknowledge that these binaries exist, yet at the same time question the ‘norms’ society has imposed on both sides of the binary.

Brian Wren’s (b. 1936) text *Bring Many Names* (1986) does just this, juxtaposing male and female, old and young language to describe God while challenging the ‘normal’ traits associated with each gender.⁵ Rather than following the common notion that anything feminine is ‘weak’ and ‘passive’, he describes God as a “strong mother God” who is active in the work of creation. In contrast to this, the male imagery for God is not the usual ‘strong’ or ‘king’ language, but rather, he uses the language of “warm father God”, utilising terms that are normally thought of as maternal traits, such as hugging and caring for children. In the final stanza, Wren points to an apophatic notion of God, highlighting that despite all the descriptions and titles used to describe God, God can never be fully comprehended: “Great, living God, never fully known, / joyful darkness far beyond our seeing, / closer yet than breathing, everlasting home.”

1 Bring many names,
beautiful and good,
celebrate, in parable and story,
holiness in glory,
living, loving God.
Hail and Hosanna!
bring many names!

2 Strong mother God,
working night and day,
planning all the wonders of creation,
setting each equation,
genius at play:
Hail and Hosanna,
strong mother God!

4 Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self. An Essay ‘On the Trinity’*, Cambridge: University Press, 2013, p. 248.

5 Brian Wren, *Bring Many Names*, Hope Publishing, available from: <http://www.hopepublishing.com/media/pdf/hset/hs_2565.pdf> (accessed 16 January 2016).

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>3 Warm father God,
hugging every child,
feeling all the strains of human living,
caring and forgiving
till we're reconciled:
Hail and Hosanna,
warm father God!</p> | <p>5 Young, growing God,
eager, on the move,
saying no to falsehood and unkindness,
crying out for justice,
giving all you have:
Hail and Hosanna,
young, growing God!</p> |
| <p>4 Old, aching God,
grey with endless care,
calmly piercing evil's new disguises,
glad of good surprises,
wiser than despair:
Hail and Hosanna,
old, aching God!</p> | <p>6 Great, living God,
never fully known,
joyful darkness far beyond our seeing,
closer yet than breathing,
everlasting home:
Hail and Hosanna,
great, living God!</p> |

Bring Many Names, by Brian Wren (© 1989 Stainer & Bell Ltd, London, England, <www.stainer.co.uk>, reprinted by kind permission).

Juxtaposing Multiple Images for God

Similar to the approach of juxtaposing male and female language for God in the same text, another method is to juxtapose multiple descriptions of God in the same text which are *not* gendered. In looking to question or destabilise expectations, hymns can explore new and creative symbols for God. In *Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud* (1986), Thomas Troeger (b. 1945) juxtaposes many names and images for God.⁶ The first stanza is full of imagery and titles that are normally associated with the first person of the Trinity, such as Fortress, Light, Judge and Mercy. Notice that within these names for the first person of the Trinity, there are images juxtaposed which are completely opposite and might seem contradictory of one another: Judge/Defender and Mercy/Might. The second stanza is full of imagery and titles associated with the second person of the Trinity, all found in the New Testament: Word, Vine, Shepherd, Lamb, Bread and Wine. The final stanza focuses on the third person of the Trinity, describing the Spirit as Breath, Dove, Fire, Comfort, Counselor, among other names. There are countless titles and images used here to describe the three persons of the Trinity, and by juxtaposing them all in

6 Thomas Troeger, *Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud*, Hope Publishing, available from: <http://www.hopepublishing.com/media/pdf/hset/hs_4590.pdf> (accessed 16 January 2016).

the same hymn, we are forced to remember – as he reiterates at the end of each stanza – that there is “no single holy name but the truth behind them all is the God whom we proclaim.”

Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud,
Fortress, Fountain, Shelter, Light,
Judge, Defender, Mercy, Might,
Life whose life all life all endowed:

Refrain:

May the church at prayer recall
that no single holy name
but the truth that feeds them all
is the God whom we proclaim.

Word and Wisdom, Root and Vine,
Shepherd, Savior, Servant, Lamb,
Well and Water, Bread and Wine,
Way who leads us to the I AM:

Refrain

Storm and Stillness, Breath and Dove,
Thunder, Tempest, Whirlwind, Fire,
Comfort, Counselor, Presence, Love,
Energies that never tire:

Refrain

Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud, by Thomas Troeger (© Oxford University Press Inc. 1987. Assigned to Oxford University Press 2010. Reproduced by permission. All rights reserved.)

A World Turned Upside Down⁷

One of the main paradoxes that still “bedevils contemporary feminist and gender theories” is the paradox of ‘equality and difference’: while it is rightfully asserted that women are equal to men in the workplace, there are still physiological and psychological differences between women and men that remain.⁸ The teachings of Jesus are rife with such paradoxes:

⁷ Acts 17,6.

⁸ Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, pp. 273 f.

Christ is for losers

DREAM ANGUS 10.10.10.11 with refrain

Christ is for los - ers, the last, and the least,
 Christ is for los - ers, the home - less, the poor,
 Christ is for los - ers, the bro - ken and ill,
 Christ is for los - ers, the wan - d'ring, the lost,

wel - com - ing sin - ners and saints to his feast;
 job - less and hope - less who knock at his door.
 lack - ing in - sur - ance to co - ver their bill.
 those called "il - le - gal" for lines they have crossed.

turn - ing a - way those who bring their own bread, all
 Christ won't ad - mit those who bring their own key, who
 Those who don't know they need heal - ing at all
 Christ u - nites peo - ple di - vi - ded by hate, and

those who as - sume they don't need to be fed.
 lock up the church that Christ calls to be free.
 pay no at - ten - tion to Christ and his call.
 cross - es the bor - ders Earth's pow - ers cre - ate.

All my loss I count as gain:

all of my weak - ness, all of my pain.

And though I die, with Christ I will rise, for

life is in Christ, the los - er's prize.

Text: Adam M.L. Tice, 2006, ©2008 GIA Publications, Inc., used by permission

Tune: Scottish traditional

Christ is for Losers, by Adam M. L. Tice (© 2008, GIA Publications, all rights reserved, used by permission).

the first shall be last and the last shall be first (Mk 10,31); if someone strikes you, turn the other cheek (Lk 6,29); and in order to live we must first die (Mt 10,39). Adam Tice's *Christ is for losers* (2006) draws on the many paradoxes in Christianity.⁹ His text is full of startling imagery, beginning with the title. Normally, Christ is not associated with those whom society has labeled a 'loser'. But here, Tice lists those whom society may not expect Christ to associate with: the "last and the least" of today, which includes those without health insurance and those labeled "illegal" immigrants. The refrain points to the many paradoxes that are associated with following Christ: "All my loss I count as gain: / all of my weakness, all of my pain. / And though I die, with Christ I will rise, / for life is in Christ, the loser's prize." This text is a reminder there is more than one binary that must be overcome in liturgy; it is not only female/male, but also rich/poor, clean/unclean, worthy/unworthy, legal/illegal, and the list goes on.

"Identity without Essence"

David Halperin has said that queer is an "identity without an essence."¹⁰ Gerald Loughlin takes this notion and applies it to God: "As an 'identity without an essence,' [...] God's being is indubitable but radically unknowable".¹¹ Loughlin therefore points to Thomas Aquinas' statement that "we do not know what God is, only what God is not".¹² Because it is impossible to know what God is, "instead of a definition we have to make do with God's effects – i.e. everything [...] The most that we can say about God is that God *is*, which is not a description but a point of theological grammar."¹³ In other words, God can be known through God's revelations and effects in life.

9 Adam M.L. Tice, *Woven Into Harmony: 50 Hymn Texts*, Chicago: GIA Publications, 2009, pp. 23–25.

10 David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 62, as quoted in Gerard Loughlin, "Introduction. The End of Sex", in: *Queer Theology. Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. by Gerard Loughlin, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007, pp. 1–34, here p. 9.

11 Loughlin, "Introduction", p. 10.

12 Ibid., referring to Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* I.3.

13 Ibid.

Shirley Erena Murray (b. 1931) describes many of these 'effects' of God which are experienced throughout life in *God of Wonder, God of Thunder* (1992).¹⁴ The first stanza juxtaposes many contradictory descriptions of God, for God is both impact and release, riddle and reason, passion and peace. The second stanza stands as a reminder that all that happens to us throughout the year should be brought forward to God as a gift to bless. The final stanza states that we both name and proclaim God as "Father, Mother, Spirit, Friend", here juxtaposing multiple images of God in one sentence, back to back. Murray also reiterates that the full comprehension of God is beyond our grasp, for God is beyond our vision and end.

- 1 God of wonder, God of thunder,
God of impact and release,
God of riddle and of reason,
God of passion and of peace –
to your mystery and marvel
we return to give you praise,
every year with you beginning
to the closing of our days.
- 2 Seasons' turning, seasons' learning,
all are held within your span:
times of growing, times of knowing
love in woman, child and man,
calendar of calm and crisis,
hurt and healing, high success,
all the instants of our being
now we bring for you to bless.
- 3 For we name you and we claim you,
Father, Mother, Spirit, Friend:
you are vision past our vision,
you are end beyond our end;
all the circles, all the cycles
of our little finite phase
now we give into your keeping,
trusting you through all our days.

God of Wonder, God of Thunder, by Shirley Erena Murray (© 1992 Hope Publishing Company, Carol Stream, IL 60188; <www.hopepublishing.com>, all rights reserved, used by permission).

14 Shirley Erena Murray, *God of Wonder, God of Thunder*, Hope Publishing, available from: <http://www.hopepublishing.com/media/pdf/hset/hs_2880.pdf> (accessed 16 January 2016).

Particularity and Equality in the Body of Christ. Looking to the Trinity as a Model

Carl Daw's (b. 1944) text, *God the Spirit, guide and guardian* (1989) beautifully reflects on the Trinity without using any gendered language whatsoever.¹⁵ Daw surprises us from the start by using the first verse to describe the Spirit, who is normally relegated to being the 'third person' of the Trinity (in most hymns the first stanza is about 'God', the second about 'Jesus' and the third 'Spirit'). He uses images to describe the Spirit (flame, dove, etc.) and then writes about the effects of the Spirit on our lives. The second stanza is about Christ, and similar to the first stanza, Daw first uses some images of Christ (sovereign, shepherd, Word) and then moves to Christ's actions on our lives. The third stanza describes the first person of the Trinity as Creator, life bestower, truth, etc. The final stanza brings together the entire hymn, praising the Triune God as "undivided and diverse" as well as "deeper than our minds can fathom", reminding us that we can never fully comprehend the Trinity. The Trinity – three separate beings in one entity – shows that in its perichoresis it is possible to retain the specificity of individual beings while also striving to remain in community, and as these hymn writers have shown, it is possible to do so while being attentive to the language used to describe God.

15 Carl P. Daw, *God the Spirit, Guide and Guardian*, Hope Publishing, available from: <http://www.hopepublishing.com/media/pdf/hset/hs_2468.pdf> (accessed 16 January 2016).

THE TRINITY

149 God the Spirit, Guide and Guardian

1 God the Spir - it, guide and guard - ian, wind - sped flame and
 2 Christ our Sav - ior, sov - ereign, shep - herd, Word made flesh, Love
 3 Great Cre - a - tor, life - be - stow - er, truth be - yond all
 4 Tri - une God, mys - te - rious be - ing, un - di - vid - ed

hov - ering dove, breath of life and voice of proph - ets, sign of
 cru - ci - fied, teach - er, heal - er, suf - fering ser - vant, friend of
 thought's re - call, fount of wis - dom, womb of mer - cy, giv - ing
 and di - verse, deep - er than our minds can fath - om, great - er

bles - ing, power of love: give to those who lead your peo - ple,
 sin - ners, foe of pride: in your tend - ing may all pas - tors*
 and for - giv - ing all: as you know our strength and weak - ness,
 than our creeds re - hearse: help us in our var - ied call - ings

fresh a - noint - ing of your grace; send them forth as
 learn and live a shep - herd's care; grant them cour - age
 so may those the church ex - alts o - ver - see its
 your full im - age to pro - claim, that our min - is -

*When appropriate, ministers, leaders, elders, or deacons may be substituted for pastors.

WORDS: Carl P. Daw, Jr. (1944-)

MUSIC: Rowland H. Prichard (1811-1887); arr. Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

Words © 1989 Hope Publishing Company

HYFRYDOL

8.7.8.7.D.

God the Spirit, Guide and Guardian, by Carl P. Daw, Jr. (© 1989 Hope Publishing Company, Carol Stream, IL 60188; <www.hopepublishing.com>, all rights reserved, used by permission).

Letting the Entire Body of Christ Speak. Moving Beyond the Female/Male Binary in Liturgy

Our cultural understanding of sex and gender – what it means to be “male” and “female” – is seriously challenged by the presence of intersex individuals. What impact does this have on our liturgy and how the liturgy teaches us what it means to be created in the image of God, if we start to think outside the female/male binary? What does it mean to recognise that there are LGBTIQ Christians in the church, and how might the liturgy need to be re-examined in order to be certain that the hymns we sing, the rites we use and the images of God we employ actually speak to and reflect the entire Body of Christ, not just one limited binary vision of it?

1. Die Frage nach der partizipativen Öffnung in Bezug auf die (symbolische) Bedeutung und Funktion der einzelnen liturgischen Gesänge¹ unter sorgfältiger Differenzierung des Teilnahmegreif in «innerliche» und «äußere» Teilnahme.² Diese Differenzierung hat das Ziel, größere Klarheit in die Diskussionen über das «aktive Hören» und das Teilverweigerprinzip zu bringen.
2. Die Frage nach dem Verhältnis von musikalischer Fei-ergestalt und Kirchenbild. Wenn Liturgie beziehungsweise die liturgische Versammlung Selbstaussdruck, Bild und Verwirklichung von Kirche ist, dann muss man aus kirchenmusikalischer Sicht fragen: Welche Musik vermittelt welches Kirchenbild? Im Rahmen des vorliegenden Themas lautet die Frage konkreter: Welches Kirchenbild vermag Musik mit Gemeindebeteiligung zu vermitteln? Hintergrund dieser Fragestellung ist die Forderung, Musik in der Liturgie müsste deren

1 Durchgeführt an der Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Graz, betreut von Franz Karl Preuß.

2 Diese Frage wird in Rudolf Padiß, «Aktive Teilnahme: Schlüsselbegriff der erlebten Liturgie», in: Im Klangraum der Kirche: Aspekte – Funktionen – Praktiken der Kirchenmusik und Liturgie, Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 2007, S. 27–52, bes. S. 41 f., formuliert.

3 Plankongregation, *Instruktion über die Musik in der heiligen Liturgie* («*musicum sacrum*» (1967) (= MS), Art. 13.

