

God as "He" - Bulldog Catholic

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Q: Why do you refer to God as “He”? Are you implying that God is male? Doesn’t this support a patriarchal worldview? I don’t see the point.

A: So, I would like to affirm what I see as the point of your question: it is vital that we understand and speak of God the right way. While we could never grasp the full mystery of the infinite God, based off of His self-revelation we are able to say some things about the nature and identity of God.

And one of those things is that God is neither male nor female. You are absolutely correct on that point. This is a Big Deal Issue for all of us because it hits on the very nature of God. Have we been created in God’s image, or is God in our image? The Catechism of the Catholic Church addresses the seriousness of this point: “In no way is God in man’s image. He is neither man nor woman. God is pure spirit in which there is no place for the difference between the sexes” (CCC 370).

So the nature of God transcends male-ness and female-ness. This is a good thing because it assures us that both man and woman find their equal dignity in God. Looking at the history of humanity, there have definitely been times when some teacher or group of teachers ignored this revelation of God's nature in order to oppress women. The Catholic Church considers this a grave evil (CCC 1935).

The words we use mean something. Words have power. This doesn't mean that we ought to discard them or change their meaning, but it does mean that we need to use them wisely. Masculine language used in reference to God can be used for evil purposes in much the same way that a scalpel can be used to destroy and not to heal, but that does not mean that we should abandon it.

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It is appropriate to refer to God with a masculine pronoun (“He”) for a number of reasons. “God has a name; He is not an anonymous force” (CCC 203). Therefore our language ought to reflect God's personhood. We refer to persons as “he” and “she”. These personal pronouns reveal that God is not an “It”, but a “Who”. I realize that referring to God as “God” does not act against God's personhood, but it certainly does not highlight it.

I do not want to place myself above God Himself. God's Word refers to God with predominantly masculine pronouns. Jesus tells us to call God “Father”. I do not think that I am in a position to tell Jesus that He was wrong in this. Some may argue that Jesus was just following the tradition of His culture.

That is worth considering, but if Jesus was a “victim” of His time and place on this very important issue, then how do we know when to pay attention to His words and when we should simply disregard them as “cultural limitations”?

None of this means that God is male, but there is something about masculinity that is revealed by God. Surely, there is quite a bit about femininity that is revealed by God as well, but the overwhelming references to God made in the Bible are masculine. I need to ask myself, “Even though I know that this doesn't tell me that God is male...does it mean anything?” Or are certain parts of the Bible meaningless? We know that Scripture needs to be studied and interpreted; we do not simply take the Bible at face-value. And yet, if I am going to disregard something in the Bible, have I taken the adequate steps to know exactly why?

G.K. Chesterton described a person discovering a fence across a road. He may say, “I don't see the point of this, clear it away.” Wisdom would say, “If you don't see the use of it, I certainly won't let you clear it away. Go away and think. Then, when you can come back and

tell me that you do see the use of it, I may allow you to destroy it.” Chesterton goes on to say, “Some person had some reason for thinking it would be a good thing for somebody.” In this case, that “some person” is God. Apparently, He wants to be called “Father”.