



Dear Friends,

How do you think of God? What mental image or impression do you have of him? – or would it be her? – or perhaps both? – or neither? These are questions being posed nowadays, whether we like it or not, by a growing number of liturgies, including one in the Methodist Worship Book, which include reference to God as not only Father but also Mother.

The predominant image we have of God in the Bible is male. This is not surprising when we consider that during the period which the Bible covers, society was heavily patriarchal, and to use any other image or representation for God would have been to diminish him. But when the Bible uses the image of 'Fatherhood' for God it is not so much his maleness which is meant as his parenthood. If God is God, if in him is contained the source and supply of ALL creation, including all that is male and all that is female, then he surely cannot be one to the exclusion of the other. He must contain both within his being.

The Bible's language about God is not necessarily unchanging or unchangeable but points beyond itself to God who is so much greater. Isaiah insists that nothing can be likened to God. God is one *'whose ways are higher than our ways and whose thoughts are higher than our thoughts.'* He nevertheless uses a rich range of images, but all are inadequate and subject to being superseded, or corrected and balanced, by others.

'To whom then will you liken God?' he asks. A good question. Just how do you describe, and so understand, God? We too have to resort to similes, metaphors and analogies, but even they are inadequate. They point in the direction of truth about God but can never capture the fullness of that truth. What we need in the language we use to describe God is a rich variety of images qualifying one another, in order to give us a more adequate understanding of God than could possibly be given by one image, or even a few.

The love of my father and the love of my mother have both been precious to me. As a parent each has given the same love, but as a mother or as a father the love of each has had something different about it; not making one more or less than the other but completing the whole, which in its ultimate fullness is found in God. When I think of God as my heavenly Father and Mother I understand and experience a depth and fullness of love I would not were I to understand and know him as one to the exclusion of the other. God's love for me cannot be less than that of my mother and my father for he is the source and inspiration of both. He is indeed Father and Mother of us all.

There's something to think about!

The Lord be with you.

John Bown

Minister of Bromley Methodist Church

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GROUND

This edition John Bown writes our leading article. It also appears in the magazines of Bromley Methodist Church & Bromley URC