

A Treasure We Don't Understand Deeper Sheet [5.03.09]

The Holy Spirit has always been active, but our engagement of it has changed dramatically. Even throughout early Christianity, the Holy Spirit was not a matter of public conversation. And in Eastern and Western Christianity today, seemingly subtle differences in language have led to drastically different understandings of the role of the Holy Spirit. Western Christians tend to focus attention on God the Father and Creator and on God the Son and Redeemer. Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit drifts around in our religious consciousness more or less obscurely. Yet the Holy Spirit is one of the things that marks us as distinctly Christian.

In Genesis 1v26-27, God says, "Let *us* make human beings in *our* image, in *our* likeness...So God created human beings in his own image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." Later in Genesis 18, Abraham is visited by three men. What is confusing, however, is that Abraham refers to them as "lord," and when they speak, the text reads, "Then the LORD said." Jewish writers and scholars have written endlessly trying to understand this mystery in the book of Genesis. About chapter 1, they have wondered who the "us" refers to. Likewise in Genesis 18, they wondered why the three men are called "LORD."

Some Jewish writers have suggested that the "us" of Genesis 1 is a reference to a passage in Proverbs in which wisdom, personified as a woman, claims to have been present at creation. There is a profound understanding in the Scriptures that God is both masculine and feminine. After the death of the Prophets, many Jews believed that God withdrew his voice and stopped speaking. But the voice of God, they believed, was so mournful from not speaking to the people that she sent the "*Bat Qol*" [that is, "daughter of the voice"], to speak loving words to the people. This voice was never seen, only heard.

Christianity understands the "us" of Genesis 1 and the "three travelers" of Genesis 18 to be the Trinity: God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer. The Holy Spirit—much more than an interesting theological idea—gives us a more holistic understanding of the God that we worship. And that matters because we become what we fall down before in worship [see below]. The Holy Spirit is the giver and sustainer of life, both in its intimate presence, tenderness, and comfort and in the way that it comes and makes its home in us.

Read Psalm 115v1-8

Now consider the statement: "We become what we fall down before in worship." What connection do you see between Psalm 115v1-8 and this statement?

How does thinking of God [Father, Son, and Holy Spirit] as hierarchical cause us to see the world as hierarchical? How does it cause us to be hierarchical ourselves?

Why do you think understanding that God is both masculine and feminine is important?

How does the femininity of God cause you to think of God differently?