

The Masculine and Feminine of God

By Katie Skurja

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When our son was not quite three-years old, you could almost see the thought bubbles form over his head when he was making a connection about some important concept. At times, announcing his astute observations could be socially awkward. On one such occasion, our friends Mark and Cynthia were visiting when I watched a thought bubble form in the air as we stood talking in the kitchen. I noticed he had been staring at them intently as they leaned against our counters. Suddenly, he lunged toward Cynthia with a finger pointing at her lower mid-section and proclaimed, "Lou have a china!" Turning toward Mark, he proudly said, "Lou have a penis!" (He couldn't yet pronounce his y's, so *you* became *lou*.) Even though our friends were both casually dressed in loose-fitting jeans and neither is a paragon of god-like sexuality, a child barely out of toddlerhood could proudly tell the difference between a man and woman. How much easier for a child to distinguish male and female when the sex-typical features are more pronounced? And yet, this is the issue at the heart of what catapulted Jordan Peterson onto the international stage.

In 2016, Peterson released a video explaining why he would refuse to comply with Canada's proposed Bill C-16 on gender identity rights. His objection had to do with the compelled speech aspect of the law, which would require state employees to use preferred pronouns of individuals including made-up words for newly minted genders. Though his detractors accuse of him of extremist ideas, his greatest "sin" is rooted in standing for free speech and the self-evident truth of the biological differences between men and women. In doing so, he became a lightning rod in the culture wars.

In speaking about men and women, I have heard Peterson on more than one occasion allude to the idea that to say *male* and *female* is not the same as saying *masculine* and *feminine*. What that difference is, I have not yet heard him specifically articulate. This absence of clarity from someone who can talk circles around most speaks to the complexity of the subject. It is far easier to talk about biological differences between men and women than the expressions of those differences in personality. Given a room of a hundred people, even a young child could successfully sort the males from the females. Distinguishing the difference between masculine and feminine is a bit trickier, providing fodder for confusion.

Part of the problem, I would like to suggest, is rooted in our language. By the very words, *masculine* is equated with *male* and *feminine* is equated to *female*. In one psychology journal article from 1974, words such as *compassionate*, *gentle*, *childlike*, *shy*, and *tender* were used on a list to describe feminine. Included in the list was the word *feminine* itself, as if it was self-evident of what that means. By contrast, words used to describe masculine included *leader*, *assertive*, *dominant*, *independent*, and *self-reliant*. Given this list of descriptors, a biological male who relates more to the *feminine* traits may feel like there is something wrong with him. In the same way, a biological female whose personality is better described as *masculine* might

believe she is defective. Such people might even be susceptible to the idea that they were born in the wrong body.

From my own experience, I can understand the difficulty of trying to tease out the nuance of talking about the difference between the biology of male and female from the psychology of masculine and feminine. However, I want to submit there is a way to talk about these differences that even a child can understand. I stumbled on this concept after unintentionally kicking a hornet's nest while teaching about the masculine and feminine sides of God in a seminary class back in 2004.

After getting some pushback from both the conservative and the progressive ends of the spectrum, I experimented with using the language of *Lion* and *Lamb* to refer to masculine and feminine respectively. Christ, as the image of God, embodies both of these natures. It was a breakthrough in the conversation, uniting both sides of the spectrum! What I discovered is we can talk freely about the Lion and Lamb sides of God, and thus of ourselves, in a way that transcends the language barriers of masculine and feminine. I found that I could talk with a big, angry Marine about his need to embrace his Lamb side without him flinching. Had I suggested he needed to face the feminine side of God, he would have stormed out of my office and never looked back. In the same way, I could talk with a mousy, petite, and fearful woman about her need to embrace her Lion side without scaring her away. If Christ, who is the image of the unseen God, is both Lion and Lamb, then so are we who are created in the image of God.

Even children as young as five-years old can tell me which of their parents is the bigger Lion. It is not always the dad. They can tell me the positive aspects as well as the negative traits (shadow sides) of each side. The mouths of babes can discuss the benefits of the Lion and Lamb learning to play nicely together on the inside (paradox). Children can also easily tell you which one they relate to more and why they are afraid of the other side (shame). Amazingly, children can apprehend and describe concepts like paradox, shadow sides, and shame with ease. I have said to many a wise young cherub in my office, "I need you to come and help me teach my class because you get this better than most adults." Indeed, we can let the children teach us if we have ears to hear.¹

Seemingly child-like metaphors, Lion and Lamb, transcend language barriers and allow us to discuss difficult concepts without the cultural baggage. These metaphors can hold and represent many characteristics in an objective, non-judgmental way. Though we tend to equate *male* with Lion qualities and *female* with Lamb qualities, there are female lions and male lambs in the natural world as well as among humans. In the animal kingdom, lions and lambs do not co-exist nor do they need to learn from each other in order to live happy lives. For us humans, it is imperative for these two sides to learn how to work together lest we wreak havoc in the world.

A metaphor I often use to discuss these split strands of DNA, the beauty of the Imago Dei and the brokenness of humanity is... a Peanut M&M[®]. Metaphorically speaking, the peanut represents the Imago Dei, the image of God inside every human being. The chocolate layer of

the Peanut M&M® represents our shame, the aspects of ourselves that we do not like or have deemed unworthy. The candy coating represents the many masks we all wear to hide the undesirable parts of ourselves. It is hard, shiny, and attractive enough to obscure the mess of the chocolate layer.

Children intuitively understand the perils operating from either end of the Lion and Lamb spectrum. When people lead with their Lamb side and are afraid of their Lion side, they will be fearful, weak, dependent, and manipulative. Both men and women can err on either end of the spectrum and thus show the shadow sides; toxic behavior can show up in many different forms and is no respecter of persons. And yet, as Peterson reminds us, there is still a difference. A strong Lion personality in a large, muscle-bound male body fueled by high levels of testosterone is going to be different than a strong Lion personality in a petite woman's body fueled by estrogen. On a physical level, there would be no contest between the two. Though the toughest female martial arts fighter could win a match against a slew of slightly built, less-trained, or out-of-shape men, she would not stand a chance in the ring against the strongest male counterpart.

From a Christian perspective, Jesus *is* the face of God. He is the Logos, as Peterson likes to say. We know about the nature and character of God by looking to Christ as the image of the unseen God. So, what does Christ tell us about masculine and feminine? Christ transcends not only the divide of masculine and feminine, but every other polarity we find ourselves debating: Greek or Jew, slave or free, rich or poor, black or white, Republican or Democrat, etc. The spirit of Christ is the preeminent example of synergy; the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. The synergistic spirit of Christ allows us to transcend the many divides plaguing our society.

In various interviews and in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, Peterson has declared the existence of the transcendent in each person to be the most important discovery in the history of the human race. When the Imago Dei, the Diamond inside each of us, is the starting point for what it means to be human, we can live in the synergy of a third way, a higher way. The Diamond can shine through humans regardless of male or female, black or white, able-bodied or not. The housing of the Imago Dei is not unimportant, but it alone does not define who we are – only the Diamond can do that. The whole is *always* greater than the sum of the parts.

ⁱTo get a glimpse of the brilliance of young children, check out the interview of children discussing these concepts: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9PELJQOfXg> Here is a shorter version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVTBnI5iEEg> These and other teachings can be found at idmin.org