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The Logic of Love

Chapter 26: Transforming the Generic God into a Name Brand

A rose is a rose by any other name.

Theopomorphism looks at reality as a reflection of God's creativity.⁽¹⁾ This art form interprets creation in terms that are harmonious with spiritual values and beliefs and seeks ways to meaningfully express these insights. The following discussion on the use of the word *Father* for God is presented as a way to apply theopomorphism to our core values and beliefs about faith. Although I believe that referring to God as our Father is *generally* the best practice, this, to me, is a lower order of belief than a faith-belief. Spiritual unity comes through recognizing each other as children of God, not through reaching uniformity on how to refer to God.

Theologizing about a name for God requires the same objectivity and detachment that was required when philosophizing about whether faith in God is a logical extension of love. There is no room for family baggage on this trip, either. Only the most universal experiences are worth considering in the development of theopomorphic insights. The shortcomings of our parents must not be allowed to cloud our vision of what it means to be a child of God. Naturally, we will project our ideal of the perfect parent onto God. But God's capacities go far beyond our own. If some of our personal experiences help us understand what it means to be a perfect parent, great. If not, we need to let it go.

Because God is everyone's parent, we must explore what is common, *and what we should strive to create as common*, to everyone's parent-child experience. Admittedly, the question of how families should function is a huge topic on which there is a great diversity of passionate opinion. There are many different types of family in today's modern world: traditional nuclear families, families that have experienced divorce, same sex couples, plural marriages, families who have adopted children, to name a few. For the purpose of this discussion, there is only one belief that needs to be accepted to appreciate the logic of what follows. It shouldn't be hard to swallow. It is simply that, *in general*, fathers provide a unique and positive value for children by participating in their upbringing.

The name we use to symbolize our relationship with God is important because it is an opportunity to reflect the values and beliefs that we hold most dear. Appreciation for the core qualities of our relationship with God can be nurtured and strengthened by the name we choose to refer to God. Additionally, appreciation for our role as human parents can be uplifted using a word that reflects our idealistic aspirations for familial love.

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me,” is a principle taught to children in an effort to help them prioritize the relative value of the spiritual, the mental, and the physical facets of life. As a true reflection of the human psyche, however, such an adage is a bold-faced lie. People do get hurt by negative labels and inspired by positive ones. One need only to look to the function of “spin doctors” to understand the effect that the power to name wields. Military, political, religious, and industrial institutions all express the importance of this power through their use of language.

Additionally, many feminist writers have brilliantly critiqued how the power to name can effect social discourse as well as the thought patterns of cultural consciousness. One of the great lessons of the feminist critique of language is the admonition to be personally proactive when faced with language that fails to reflect the progressive march of societal and individual values. It encourages us to not only rename where appropriate, but also to redefine in those instances where an old word has an opportunity to take on new meaning.

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By wisely choosing a name God, we can create a more personal and intimate relationship. A shared meaning for God's name also helps unify those with common faith-beliefs.

Although this section is primarily focused on redefining the use of the word *Father* in the spirit of feminist critique, what follows should not be interpreted to mean that we should stick to just one name for God. Different contexts call for different names. Some contexts call for reference to God's parental love. Other contexts focus on God's power, primacy, or universality. Inasmuch as faith is an extension of love, a name for God that reflects the value of love has merit over words that reflect other attributes. It is in this sense that some names may be "better" than other names. Three core attributes of our relationship to God justify *Father* as the best name for God.

- (1) We are children of God.
- (2) We share with God the quality of being persons.
- (3) We share with God the quality of freewill.

Incorporating these three connotations is important because they provide structure for understanding and living a life of love. These core qualities of relationship provide guidance about who and how to love as well as affirming that we *can* love.

Footnote:

(1) One of my assumptions is that spiritual beliefs should never be in conflict with the discoveries of science. When there is an apparent conflict, either the discoveries of science are inaccurate, spiritual beliefs are incorrect, or both. In terms of creation, this implies that evolution is one of God's ways of creating.

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