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posite of my message—we both learned something that day. He learned something of what women have felt all along. I learned that we must mix our metaphors carefully in order not to repeat the exclusivity we've been subjected to.

I want to share some of the specific ways we can introduce gender-inclusive language and imagery for God. First, search for the hidden examples of feminine imagery for God in the Bible and in Christian tradition. Don't be put off by the fact that past interpretations may not have brought all of this to light. Biblical scholars can be blinded by cultural prejudices just like anyone else—some people would say more so! But my book *From Hierarchy to Equality* makes it clear that we must always be wary of the cultural presuppositions of biblical interpreters. And that includes our own blindnesses. We are all bound up in our culture. The paradox is that unless we realize this, we actually limit God from speaking a fresh word to us.

Another suggestion: build on the cues the Bible and the history of our tradition have given us. You might have to look in unexpected places sometimes. The Shakers, for example, developed the concept of the Father-Mother God. I think the concept has potential as long as we make it clear we are not talking about two gods, but about one fully inclusive God. The parental image of God is still a good one, even though we need to augment it, because it not only points to the power of God, but it helps us trust a God who takes a loving parental interest in us.

But God is also a friend. Here is a place feminine imagery could be used effectively. The image of God as friend was developed especially well during the middle ages. One Cistercian, Aelred of Rievaulx, noted that the inner dynamic of friendship is one of equalizing. Real friends try to be on a par with one another. Jesus said he called us slaves no longer but friends. So we are actually being fashioned into God's friends—quite a mind-boggling idea.

Another place I see a strong theological avenue for feminine imagery is in our speaking and thinking of the Holy Spirit. Now I am most definitely *not* advocating that we should have "two "he's" and one "she"." But there is some real theological room here, because the Holy Spirit has been the least stereotyped of all three divine persons or "modes-of-being." The true identity of the Holy Spirit has eluded Christian thinkers, and they have tended to fuse the Spirit with the other two, sometimes calling the Spirit an energy or a bond of love. Yet because of the Spirit's anonymity and hiddenness, she is especially close to the role of hiddenness women in our culture have had to assume. And so here is a place we can seize the stereotype and revolutionize it.

But we must not focus solely on the Spirit as we introduce feminine imagery for God, or else we will end up with, as I put it rather crudely before, "two "he's" and a "she"," which is an equally distorted view of God, since it destroys the unity of the Godhead, the foundation of our faith.

The key issue as we open ourselves to feminine language and imagery for God is to reclaim our birthright—the depth and fullness of knowing God. For we have lost this treasure along with the loss of our own wholeness. By searching for the hidden aspects of God and bringing them to light, we will also bring the fullness of our own selves into the light.

So I urge to expand your knowledge of God. Begin to incorporate the feminine imagery for God into your worship, into your thinking and into your speaking. Recognize that since you are *already* doing theology—let it be *good* theology.

But be careful not to submit again to the yoke of bondage.

Because it is for freedom that Christ has set us free.

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[1] *The Power of Language Among the People of God and the Language about God "Opening the Door"* UPC (U.S.A.) 1979.

[2] Lady Julian of Norwich, 13th C.; Clement of Alex. (2nd C); John Chrysostum (4th C); (Mother hen imagery).

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

From Knowledge to Wisdom: The Seminary as Dining Hall

by Hal Miller

Theological education ought to be nourishing to the spirit. At least there are texts of Scripture which might give you that impression. Psalm 19 insists that the Law of the Lord makes the simple wise, gives joy to the heart, and tastes sweeter than honey (vv. 7, 8, and 10). A proverb says the one who finds wisdom and understanding is blessed, for these things are worth more than any material treasure (Prov.. 3:13–15). And 2 Timothy sees Scripture as a resource for wisdom and righteousness (3:15–16).

So, it's no surprise that many people enter seminaries with the expectation of gaining not merely knowledge, but wisdom as well. To be able to spend two (or three, or more) years studying the things of God—ah, truly blessed task, one which will surely nourish the spirit. This is not mere "secular learning"; this is pursuit of the very treasures of the kingdom.

Sometimes reality strikes in the middle of memorizing a Hebrew conjugation. Sometimes it invades when one is trying to see the difference between *posse non pecare* and *non posse pecare*. And sometimes it comes during an attempt to figure out a use of the genitive in some Pauline epistle. But whenever it comes, it comes as a shock. This is sweeter than honey? If this is the treasure of the kingdom, why don't I hear the jingle of coins in my pockets? With a jolt, you come to the realization that you might be gaining knowledge, but wisdom is nowhere involved.

That shock is a common part of seminary experience. No matter what goals and desires you entered seminary with, somehow the process of theological learning has turned dusty and dry. It has become so much rote, no different than learning social statistics or western civ. The days when you read the Bible with child's eyes have gone; now it is merely one more document to be mastered. When before you spent every spare hour immersed in theologies or commentaries, now you find yourself watching the clock anxiously, waiting until you can leave off studying with a minimum of guilt.

A good deal of any sensitive seminarian's time is spent trying to overcome this problem and integrate theological studies with spiritual life. I remember poring over lexical studies, spending hours amidst reference books, and wrestling with the likes of Moltmann, Bultmann, or Cullman, wondering what all this had to do with knowing God. The years I had pictured as glorious and sweet turned out to be just another parenthesis in life—something I had to get through so I could go on to what was really important.

Naturally, such a situation is as troubling to those watching the process as to those who experience it. Spouses, parents, pastors, and professors each in their own ways are disturbed by the lack of connection between theological education in America and the spiritual nurture which one can indicate by the word "wisdom.". Among the learned, this distress spawns ever renewed cries to integrate the spiritual with the intellectual in seminaries and theological schools. We all agree: wisdom needs to be added to our knowledge.

But what are the recommendations? Compulsory chapel attendance? Prayer before lectures? Stricter rules concerning lifestyle and deportment? Fine. But all these assume that the problem is merely an organizational one which can be solved by adding (or subtracting) one element or another from theological education. Unfortunately, such a strategy simply places two things—the intellectual and the spiritual—beside each other in the life of a seminarian. And that's not the same as integrating them.

Hal Miller holds a PhD in Systematic Theology from Boston College, and is TSF representative for New England.

Furthermore, the very way we ask the question, "how can we integrate the spiritual with the intellectual?" is itself a symptom of the problem rather than a step towards its solution. We implicitly assume that the intellectual dimension is the substance of theological education and the spiritual is simply a kind of lubricant to make it go down smoothly. We seem to think the "spiritual" is something akin to the religious doggerel one can find on greeting cards: edifying, uplifting, but intellectually vacuous. And the intellectual is—sad to say—dry and difficult, but nonetheless the central goal of theological education.

But what if this analysis itself is already a blunder? What if the intellectual and the spiritual are not like two substances which need to be mixed together to make a happy seminarian? What if, rather, they are two different aspects of the same reality? If so, it would mean that the problem does not require us to bring together two disparate, alien things but to find out how *we* have become so fragmented that we can perceive these only as two separate realities. We need to ask why we find ourselves choosing between knowledge and wisdom rather than seeing knowledge become wisdom. Putting it another way, the problem is not to bring together the intellectual and the spiritual (as if they were somehow far apart). The problem is to see the intellectual in the spiritual and the spiritual in the intellectual.

To try to visualize this different kind of solution, maybe we would be better off returning to that initial confrontation with frustration in seminary, the "This is sweeter than honey?" experience. The problem is common indeed, but more important than this it is similar to other problems we experience. And a comparison to one of these can give us a helpful doorway into this problem. I know that it may seem perverse to talk about "theological junk food" or bolting your spiritual meals (both of which I am presently going to do), but I have found some aspects of eating to be not unlike the frustrations I experienced in seminary. For in some ways, the "This is sweeter than honey?" experience amounts to feeling very full of knowledge and hopelessly hungry for wisdom.

Consider this: I have found myself, more often than I would like to admit publicly, rushing around without time for a proper meal. Rather than take steps to make my schedule more humane, I resort to that all-American solution to the problem: fast food. A Big Mac, fries, and a shake later, I'm off and continuing to run.

Yet a couple hours later, although I'm not exactly hungry, I have a vague feeling that something is wrong. I'm unsatisfied. I have a taste for . . . no, that's not it. I need to . . . uh uh, I just ate. The problem is that I didn't just eat. I *thought* I ate; I certainly went through the motions of placing food in my mouth, chewing it briefly and then swallowing. And yet it's some how not satisfying. Even though I did every thing we naively would call "eating", my vague dissatisfaction is the first sign that something is wrong. Maybe the simple act of eating bears closer examination.

Food, after all, has at least two different functions for human beings: it tastes good and it nourishes us. Both of these functions were apparently intended by the Creator. It seems to me that God could easily have made us so we gained nourishment the same way we get oxygen—by a continual, mostly unnoticed process of breathing. Instead, we get our nourishment from food, which exists in a mind-boggling variety of forms. We might easily have been formed to gain our nutrition from some kind of Soylent Green in our environment. But instead, God laid out every different tree of the garden (save one) from which we might eat. This pleasure which God intentionally included in eating involves more than mere variety of taste. Food also gives us sights, smells, and social meanings which are not simply matters of the tongue. Though many of God's creatures feed, we have meals. And our meals are times for fellowship as well as an intricate web of beauty, smells, and tastes. This variety and aesthetic pleasure of food was our Maker's intention, just as much as was the nourishment it gives us.

But nourishment was also part of God's intention for food. The human body needs a wide variety of trace elements and other nutrients. And by eating a reasonable balance of various food, we can get these with little difficulty. But under normal circumstances, we cannot consume unlimited quantities of food. Rather, when our nutritional needs are more or less fulfilled, we become full and desire no more food. If the only function of food were the aesthetic pleasure of taste, we might expect eating to be something more like seeing. We can look at things (and gain pleasure from seeing) almost indefinitely. But because food is for both nourishment and taste, we do not eat indefinitely.

So, it appears that in the bounty and variety of God's good creation we have been given food for two different but intimately related reasons: taste and nutrition. Food nourishes and delights, and doesn't do one without the other. All this, however, is under normal conditions, a phrase which doesn't describe our era very well at all. When we bolt meals to keep up with our own personal rat race, we separate those two aspects of eating. For one "good" reason or another, our fast food mentality drives apart that which belongs together.

We have even managed to separate that which belongs together by creating a whole new kind of food—junk food. Junk food just tastes, that's all; it is taste robbed of nourishment. You don't have to be a natural foods fanatic to see that there is something seriously wrong with that kind of thing. When you eat junk food, you feel like you're eating, and it might even taste quite interesting. The only problem is that your body is fooled into thinking it is being nourished (since no one told it that taste and nutrition could be separated). In reality, however, all you are getting is "empty calories." What is it that is so wrong with this situation? The key thing (and the one which will help us understand the problem of knowledge and wisdom) is that in order to prefer fast food or create junk food, we have to take two things which belong together—the aesthetic and nutritional aspects of eating—and drive them apart by "processing." This processing isn't just done by the nasty old multi-nationals who conspire against us by marketing food without nutrition and then selling vitamin pills to make up for the deficit. We are just as guilty, for we "process" our food to tear apart these meanings as well. The "processing" I chose to do when I rushed for the fast-food solution to my schedule destroyed its significance as a meal. I was merely "feeding," and processed by food so that it gave me nutrition without satisfaction.

It is certainly amazing that our culture has been able to develop a kind of food devoid of nourishment, and a way of eating evacuated of pleasure. But in order to appreciate fully the perversity of this situation, you need to consider the long term effects of this kind of diet. After a while, you actually end up preferring junk food to the real thing. Given a choice between a candy bar and a carrot, what red-blooded American kid would fail to choose the candy bar? After awhile, you become habituated into thinking that food is *supposed* to be like this—merely taste and empty calories. Isn't that why God saw fit to give us multivitamins?

Or think of the other side. If I take the hours necessary to prepare and eat a meal with others, those are hours I will not devote to "important" things. But if I grab a bite here and there, I have more time for studying or appointments or evangelism or . . . If we had been meant to eat slowly, God wouldn't have given us microwaves and Big Macs.

Now you can imagine the effects of this over a prolonged period. An occasional candy bar is a pretty innocuous (even if nutritionally useless) pleasure. And a Whopper now and again may be a necessary concession to the modern age. But if you make such things a steady diet, you should expect your body and spirit to rebel. And in many cases of the seminarian's "This is sweeter than honey?" experience, something analogous to this has happened. All the theological junk food we eat makes the spirit go bonkers; it rebels because all it is getting are empty calories. Add to this the speed at which we are forced to consume what nourishment there is in the curriculum, and is it any wonder many people leave seminary with a severe case of theological heartburn?

Now, use the analogy to try to rethink your theological eating habits. How is it that we have made it possible to consume theological food all day and yet not be nourished by it? How do we end up gaining knowledge without wisdom? Here too, the key lies in the way we "process" things. Sometimes, someone else has done the faulty processing, delivering to our eyes a piece of theological junk food—pure intellectual savor without nourishment. Still, it would be unfair to put the blame onto others. Even theological marshmallow fluff can be interesting on occasion; spiritual malnutrition only happens when you try to live on it.

Overall, I think there are three ways in which we fail to gain wisdom with our knowledge, which you can think of as three bad ways of processing. The first concerns the way we select our theological food: we tend to go for taste rather than nutrition. There are all kinds of exegetical studies, or theological ramblings, or ethical questionings to delight the intellect. And intellectual delight is not to be despised. Yet if intellectual delight is the only criterion you use for choosing a diet of reading, you run the risk of trying to live on theological twinkies. Other, more substantial foods might not give you the instant gratification of a sweet nothing, but they will at least nourish you.

Don't misunderstand me. I certainly don't shy away from the desserts of the intellectual world. The latest controversy out of Germany (or California) attracts my attention as much as anyone else's. But I have learned that I can't make a steady diet of these things and stay healthy. I also need the more earthy nourishment of Augustine, Luther, Anselm, and Edwards, even though I know I have to chew them more thoroughly. I have learned to eat cabbage and squash as well as candy and cakes. And in the process, I have learned that the vegetables taste good too (though liking theological spinach seems to be an acquired taste rather than a natural one).

Second, if you want to gain nourishment from theology, you can't wolf it down and rush off to something else. There is no such thing as spiritual fast food. If you try to eat things quickly, without adequate chewing and savoring, all you'll get is indigestion. Unfortunately, those of us who grew up with TV have a very difficult time understanding this. We are used to the most earth-shaking problems being resolved within 30 minutes, before it's time for station identification. Yet that is a fantasy world. In truth, no theological problem worth thinking about can be solved quickly, and few works worth reading can be read quickly. Anything of consequence takes time; theological nourishment is no exception. It requires long hours of mulling and questioning, and needs to be thought of as more like a leisurely meal than a hamburger on the run.

Third, you cannot get proper theological nutrition by tasting from every one else's plate and never sitting down to your own. Even with physical food, such behavior would be very bad manners; with theological food, it is also injurious. Theological dishes which meet someone else's may or may not meet yours; or, to put it another way, spending all your time nibbling on theological questions in which you have no personal interest is a certain way to remain hungry.

Think of some examples. Does it seem important to you to master the history of Luther's reformation? Or to understand the significance of *hupotassomai* in Romans 13? Or to grasp what Karl Barth was up to? Those are certainly questions which others have thought worth the time spent chewing, but for you to be nourished by those questions, they must become yours. If you try to hover over other people's plates, one after another, without ever sitting down and beginning to chew on the questions which you yourself have, you will certainly remain hungry. But if you eat your own meal, you can also get great delight from sampling from others' plates.

Now, we are in a position to come full circle and see the relation of the intellectual and the spiritual—knowledge and wisdom—in the theological enterprise. Far from being two different things which must be brought together, they are normally two aspects of the same reality, much as taste and nutrition are normally two aspects of eating. To ask how the two can be brought together only show that we have eaten theological junk food for so long that we think we can only get wisdom by adding on a spiritual vitamin pill to our normal diet of Cheetos.

On the contrary, knowledge and wisdom are inherently unified. The reason they are separate in our experience has to do with the way we process them. If this is so, what might be a better process, one which maximizes both taste and nutrition, both knowledge and wisdom? Anselm of Canterbury—whose work falls among the vegetables of the theological world—described such a process as "faith seeking understanding," a phrase which might be worth chewing on.

If theology is "faith seeking understanding," the beginning of the process is in faith, in an orientation of dependence upon and trust in God. But this faith is not static; it is seeking. And if it is seeking, it must be lacking something. Yes—it lacks understanding. To translate this into other terms, one begins the theological process with faith, but not with a smug, satisfied faith. This is a faith which is seeking. How does it seek what it lacks? by asking questions; by looking for answers. What Anselm means by "faith seeking understanding" can be translated just so. He means that the process of theology is a process of "faith asking questions." Most people who go to seminary go because they are asking questions, and want help finding answers. Once they arrive, though, a subtle transformation takes place. Confronted with four or five courses to study—languages, exegesis, systematic theology, pastoral skills, ethics, or whatever—they tend to quit asking questions and start trying merely to absorb answers. Unfortunately, most of these are pre-packaged answers to questions they never asked. They are mere information, filed carefully away to be brought out (maybe) someday. The result is that they spend their time nibbling on others' plates and pay no attention to their own.

Is it any wonder many people leave seminary with a severe case of theological heartburn?

What happened to their own questions? Most likely they too got filed away, somewhere between ecclesiology and eschatology. And the result is that rather than sitting down to a full meal, based on the questions they were really asking, seminary turns into picking from the plates of others, quickly gulping down the morsels one finds there, and (more than likely) choosing far too many of the cute desserts and too few of the coarser but more nourishing dishes.

How can you avoid falling into these three bad ways of processing theological food? One way to go about it is twofold, and is rooted in Anselm's idea of the theological process, which I translated as "faith asking questions." On one hand, you need to give attention to questions that you genuinely have. Most seminary courses are flexible enough that you can mold them toward your own particular issues. Don't be taken away by every theological question which happens to be in vogue—those vary from seminary to seminary and from year to year. If you seriously ask your own questions, you will be better off in the long run than if you superficially ask some one else's. In short, you need to spend some time finding out just what questions you really have, and then pursuing them.

But won't that lead you into a one-sided, idiosyncratic education? Yes; so on the other hand you need to pursue the second side of the theological process—making another's question your own. Let me illustrate. When you find someone (a friend, a professor, or an author) absorbed in an issue which appears silly to you, don't assume that it is inconsequential just because it is not your own question. Rather, try to find out why they see it as important and grasp it for yourself. Notice that this is a very different process than nibbling off someone else's plate. Nibbling implies being a detached diletante in someone else's theological world. The attempt to grasp another person's question means entering that world yourself and being a co-questioner there. In this case, you are seeing the value in a question which some one else has raised, and beginning to ask it yourself.

This double process of faith asking questions—asking your own questions and grasping someone else's questions—can give a way of processing theological food so that knowledge and wisdom are not torn apart, but are left in their naturally integrated state. Being trained in theology, after all, need not be mere intellectual titillation supplemented with spirituality. It can be a feast "sweeter than honey" which leaves you both satisfied and nourished.