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Journal Article

**Barton, Mufti. 2009. “Gender-Bender God: Masculine Or Feminine?” *Black Theology: An International Journal* 142–66.**

Barton’s article examines the Eurocentric image of God as a white, old male. This image of God is socially contrasted, primarily through Westernized art. The most famous example is the image of God is Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel. While such an image of God intersects race, age and gender, Barton focuses on gender and the masculinity of God. As an Indian Christian, Barton’s perspective on this topic is rooted in her own cultural center.

It is only when she travels to England that she encounters the Eurocentric image of God as a white, aged male for the first time. This image shocks her. She equates this image of God as not only idolatrous, but dangerous. She contends that this image of God influences our behavior towards individuals believe are not made in God’s image. To illustrate this point, Barton utilizes the conversation between Celie and Shug in Alice Walker’s *Color Purple.*

In the bible God is attributed with both masculine and feminine qualities and at sometimes rendering God genderless. Barton contends that while humans are biologically male and female, God is neither, since he does not have a physical body. Barton explores the gender of the divine in the Holy Spirit, Jesus, Divine Wisdom and in the name of God. For the purposes of my paper I focused on the name of God. While in western Christianity the name for God is simply God, in the bible God has many names. Two common names for God in the bible that I chose to focus on are *Elohim*, *El Shaddai.*

*Elohim* is plural and is derived from the Sematic female god, Eloha, and a male god, El. This plural nature and ontological root of *Elohim* illustrate the feminine and masculine identity of God. In Genesis *Elohim* creates humankind, male and female, in our image (our meaning God’s image). The use of the word our to denote the image of God as female and male again illustrates the feminine and masculine nature of God in the bible. As Barton points out, both genders are present in humankind as well as in *Elohim*.

While *El Shaddai* isoften translated as “God Almighty” it can also mean “God of the Breasts”. In Genesis 49:25, God is portrayed as a mother giving blessings of the breast and the womb:

*“By the God (El) of your father, who will help you, by the Almighty (Shaddai) who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts (shad) and of the womb (rechem)”*

The Hebrew term for womb is *rechem*. In Hebrew the words womb, compassion and mercy all stem from the same root. According to Barton, mercy and compassion can literally mean womb-love. God then continually speaks of his womb-love for humanity throughout the bible.