



Christian Reflection
A Series in Faith and Ethics

Christian Reflection

Center for Christian Ethics
Baylor University
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Study Guides for

Women and the Church

These guides integrate Bible study, prayer, and worship to explore how women continue to be essential to the spiritual backbone and transformed mind of faithful Christian communities, even those in which their leadership roles are circumscribed by their gender. Use them individually or in a series. You may reproduce them for personal or group use.

Recovering Discarded Images 2

Scripture's feminine metaphors for God yield a more dynamic understanding of divine nature and remind us that women as well as men are capable of bearing God's image in the world. Embracing these images in worship helps us to engage with God's gracious, multifaceted invitation to us.

Female Preaching in Early Nineteenth-Century America 4

In the Second Great Awakening more than one hundred women crisscrossed the country as itinerant preachers, holding meetings in barns, schools, or fields. They were the first group of women to speak publicly in America. As biblical feminists, they were caught between two worlds—too radical to be accepted by evangelicals, but too conservative to be accepted by women's rights activists. Why have virtually all of them been forgotten?

Anne Dutton as a Spiritual Director 6

During the Evangelical Revival, laypeople and clergy enthusiastically turned to Anne Dutton for spiritual counsel. Perceived by readers as remarkably wise, loving, and sensitive to the Spirit, she shared insights on watchfulness for sin and the Christian journey toward joy.

Triumph of the Eye 8

In a society ever more determined by the visual appeal of things, men begin to desire women who conform to a certain shape and look perpetually young. Women, in turn, strive to conform to eye-driven male desire. How can we reshape imagination to prefer spiritual vision to mere sight?

What Should We Say about Mary? 10

As Protestants show new interest in the mother of Christ, they often think they need to have something to say *about* Mary, rather than *to* her. Why not begin with the first words spoken both *to* and *about* Mary from God's own messenger, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28)? If we offer this as an address, rather than a theological proposition, we might begin to understand more fully what it means to honor Mary.



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Focus Article:

📖 Recovering Discarded Images
(*Women and the Church*, pp. 11-19)

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Recovering Discarded Images

Scripture's feminine metaphors for God yield a more dynamic understanding of divine nature and remind us that women as well as men are capable of bearing God's image in the world. Embracing these images in worship helps us to engage with God's gracious, multifaceted invitation to us.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Job 38:1-11

Responsive Reading

Come all who have gathered,
to taste and see that God is good,
to trust and hope in the Holy One:

the Holy Creator,
the Holy Redeemer,
the Holy Midwife in our midst.

Because of you, O God, we are not consumed,
your compassions never fail.

They are new every morning.
Great is your faithfulness.

Reflection

Metaphors for God in Scripture serve two key functions: teaching us about God and drawing us nearer to God experientially. They not only illuminate "the unknown by use of the known and the infinite through the finite," Kristina LaCelle-Peterson writes, but also "draw on personal experience... [to] produce an emotional response, so we experience one thing in terms of another."

"God's nature is too immense to be captured by one image and our disparate life situations too varied to be tapped by one metaphor," she reminds us. Thus, the biblical images comparing God to inanimate objects, forces of nature, animals, people in various roles, and both human genders should not be taken literally or alone. Indeed, focusing on just one might lead us to a form of idolatry, to "confuse the metaphor with reality and make absolute something that was meant to be illustrative." Rather, following the lead of Scripture, we should allow these images to balance and enrich one another.

For instance, the book of Job employs both male and female images to characterize God's creative activity. Like a builder (typically a man's employment in the ancient world), God lays the earth's foundation and cornerstone (38:4-6); but like a midwife, God cares for the emerging waters (38:8-11). In his notes on the latter passage, John Wesley (1703-1791) explained that as the sea breaks forth "from the womb...of the earth" by divine command "like a newborn infant," God wraps it in "clouds as swaddling-bands" and lovingly prepares "those hollow places in the earth, which might serve for a cradle to receive and hold this great and goodly infant when it came out of the womb."¹

Given the many female images for God in Scripture, LaCelle-Peterson observes, "the question is not whether using female images for God will draw us away from orthodox Christianity, but whether using exclusively male metaphors will so distort our view of God as to render our concept of God unbiblical."



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She concludes with this advice for incorporating Scripture's feminine language for God in our prayer and worship:

- ▶ *Address God in gender-neutral terms* (Gracious God or Loving Savior) or *feminine images* (Holy Midwife or Divine Wisdom) sometimes in order to avoid conceiving of God as male. "Sermons and other Christian instruction should include the metaphorical pictures from Scripture of God as female so that worshipers know that this is a biblical approach to God (and not the invention of the feminist movement)," she adds.
- ▶ *Use the variety of biblical terms to affirm the Trinitarian nature of God.* In addition to employing the creedal (and oft-found biblical) wording for the Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, we can carefully follow New Testament writers who address God in other ways, even in Trinitarian formulations (e.g., 2 Corinthians 13:13; cf. Romans 7:25 and 16:20, 27; 1 Corinthians 15:57; Philippians 1:3-6; and Jude 24-25).
- ▶ *Respond to concerns about using feminine metaphors for God.* Some may object that since Jesus taught us to pray "Our Father," we should address God in no other way. However, Jesus refers to God in other ways, New Testament writers use a variety of names for God, and in prayers outside the Gospels, God is never addressed as "Father." Another objection is that since Jesus was a male human being, God must be gendered. LaCelle-Peterson replies, "Obviously to enter into the human race God had to adopt biological sex, not to mention a particular skin color, eye color, height, and so on. None of these things are characteristics of the whole Trinity, but of the divine-human Savior who came among us."

Study Questions

1. Discuss how masculine and feminine images of God are balanced in scripture passages such as: Isaiah 42:14-15a; Luke 15:1-10; and Luke 13:18-21//Matthew 13:31-33.
2. Consider how feminine images stand alone to describe God in scripture passages such as: Deuteronomy 32:18; Psalm 131:2; Isaiah 66:12a, 13a; Hosea 11:3-4; and Luke 13:34.
3. The New Testament teaches that believers experience a "new birth" from God (John 3:3-10; James 1:18; and 1 Peter 1:3) and are nursed in their infancy by God (1 Peter 2:2-3). What do these female images teach us about our relationship to God?
4. According to LaCelle-Peterson, what are the theological dangers of using only masculine metaphors for God?
5. "The most significant name for God in the Old Testament, *Yahweh*, I AM, emphasizes God's being, not a male identity," LaCelle-Peterson writes. "God is not pictured as a sexualized male deity akin to Ba'al or any of the other gods of the Ancient Near East who had female consorts with whom to procreate." What is the importance of these facts?
6. What concerns you most about incorporating female imagery for God in prayer and worship?

Departing Hymn: "The Sacred Now"

† John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament* (1765), Job 38:8-10.



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Focus Article:

📖 Female Preaching in Early Nineteenth-Century America
(*Women and the Church*, pp. 20-29)

Suggested Articles

📖 Women in Ministry: Beyond the Impasse
(*Women and the Church*, pp. 77-87)

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Female Preaching in Early Nineteenth-Century America

In the Second Great Awakening more than one hundred women crisscrossed the country as itinerant preachers, holding meetings in barns, schools, or fields. They were the first group of women to speak publicly in America. Why have they been forgotten?

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:1-21

Meditation†

God has been moving against the bias of gender for all of time, and carefully reading Acts 2:17 in its original context of the book of the prophet Joel is indeed a monumental example of this breaking through....

The greatest news of all human history is the coming of Jesus Christ. What Peter and Joel are saying is awesomely close to this fact, if not equally important to it. It is that the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is coming also. This coming has not received anywhere near its rightful emphasis. We have a church season called *Pentecost*, but even in the liturgical churches, the true significance of the coming of the Holy Spirit “on all flesh” is far from adequately presented.

Ella Pearson Mitchell (1917-2008)

Reflection

While “the largest, most influential churches in the early nineteenth century forbade women to preach, particularly the Congregationalists, the Presbyterians, and the Episcopalians, a small number of new, dissenting sects challenged the restrictions on women’s religious speech,” Catherine Brekus writes. “Anti-authoritarian, anti-intellectual, and often visionary, they deliberately set themselves apart from the ‘worldliness’ of established churches by insisting that God could choose anyone – even the poor, uneducated, enslaved, or female – to spread the gospel.”

She briefly traces the story of evangelicals – especially Freewill Baptists, Christian Connection, northern Methodists, African Methodists, and Millerites – who allowed women to preach.

- ▶ *Practical motivations.* As their revivals spread and new congregations quickly formed, the evangelicals did not have enough male ministers. And, frankly, it was difficult to control what happened during the emotional camp meetings.
- ▶ *Theological reasons.* Fearing the colonies’ established churches had “quenched the spirit” by requiring college education for ministers, evangelicals said “God could communicate directly with people through dreams, visions, and voices,” Brekus notes. They appealed to Joel’s promise (quoted by Peter at Pentecost) to invest “female preaching with transcendent significance. Whenever a woman stood in the pulpit, she was a visible reminder that Christ might soon return to earth.”
- ▶ *Distinctive feminism.* Just by speaking in public, these women seemed dangerously radical. Yet influenced by the wider culture, they did not think the Bible sanctioned their equality with men in Church, home, or political life. Rather than seeking ordination



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and settled pastorates, they remained itinerate evangelists. So, these biblical feminists were caught between two worlds—too radical to be accepted by evangelicals, but too conservative to be accepted by women’s rights activists.

- ▶ *Later restrictions.* As the small evangelical sects grew to flourishing denominations by the 1830s and 1840s, writes Brekus, “They built seminaries to educate young men for the ministry, discouraged visionary ‘enthusiasm,’ urged converts to behave with greater restraint at camp meetings, toned down their millennial language, and perhaps not surprisingly, abandoned their earlier support for female preaching.”

“Despite ridicule, harassment, and their own fears of appearing radical or ‘unfeminine,’ they devoted their lives to proclaiming God’s grace,” Brekus concludes. “Someday, they prayed, female preachers would no longer feel like ‘strangers and pilgrims’ in the evangelical churches that had inspired them.”

Study Questions

1. “In their early years [evangelicals] had protested against the established churches,” Catherine Brekus observes, “but by the 1840s they had *become* the establishment.” Discuss how this influenced their perspective on women preachers.
2. What lessons should we learn from the lives of these early nineteenth-century female preachers in America?
3. In “Women in Ministry,” Gretchen Ziegenhals urges evangelicals to embrace “a thoughtful Christian feminism.” What makes it distinctive from other forms of feminism today?

Departing Hymn: “The Women’s Hymn” (vv. 1, 3, and 4)

Come, women, wide proclaim
life through your Savior slain;
sing evermore.
Christ, God’s effulgence bright,
Christ, who arose in might,
Christ, who crowns you with light,
praise and adore.

Work with your courage high,
sing of the daybreak nigh,
your love outpour.
Stars shall your brow adorn,
your heart leap with the morn,
and, by his love upborne,
hope and adore.

Then when the garnered field
shall to our Master yield
a bounteous store,
Christ, hope of all the meek,
Christ, whom all the earth shall seek,
Christ your reward shall speak,
joy evermore.

Fannie E. S. Heck (1913)

Tune: ITALIAN HYMN

† Ella Pearson Mitchell, “All Flesh,” *The African American Pulpit* (Spring 1998).



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Focus Article:

📖 Anne Dutton as a
Spiritual Director
(*Women and the Church*, pp.
30-36)

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Anne Dutton as a Spiritual Director

In the great Evangelical Revival that spread from Great Britain to Europe and America, laypeople and clergy turned to Anne Dutton (1692-1765) for counsel. Perceived by readers as remarkably wise, loving, and sensitive to the Spirit, she shared insights on watchfulness for sin and the Christian journey toward joy.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Meditation†

Amma Syncretica said, “We have no security in this world. The Apostle said, ‘Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.’ We are sailing on uncharted seas, as the psalmist David said, ‘Our life is like a sea.’ Yet some seas have dangerous reefs, some are full of sharks, some seas are calm. It seems as if we are sailing in calm waters, while men of the world are sailing in rough weather. We are sailing in daylight, led by the sun of righteousness, while they are being driven along in the night of ignorance. Yet it often happens that worldly men, sailing in darkness and through storms, are so afraid of danger that they save the ship by calling upon God and by watchfulness, while we, in our calm waters, become careless, leave the proper course of righteousness, and are sunk.”

Reflection

Though her husband, a Baptist pastor, completely supported her ministry, others resisted Anne Dutton’s private teaching and writing letters of spiritual direction. She responded that she was a “private Christian” called to a “public work” to “preach Christ and his truths...both doctrinally and practically before all.”

“During her lifetime over fifty of her books appeared in print,” Michael Sciretti notes, offering counsel to individuals or congregations “uncertain about their salvation, worried about their progress in their faith, distressed over afflictions in their lives, or confused about specific doctrinal matters.”

He commends two themes that recur through her writings:

- ▶ *Watching our thoughts.* To keep our hearts directed toward God, Dutton recommended prayer, meditation on Scripture, and watchfulness. “Watch the first motions of sin, and kill them in the bud,” she wrote. “Beware likewise, that you go not to the string’s-end, as it were, that you go not to the utmost of that liberty you think you may have, and yet keep from the act of sin. Dallying with temptations is entering into them.” She distinguished immoral thoughts—blasphemous, angry, anxious, or unbelieving fantasies or ideas that come into our minds—and actions to which we willfully consent. The best response to temptation, she had learned by personal experience, is to “come to Christ, as a poor Sinner, just as I came at first.” Rather than fight against oppressive thoughts, we should “venture on Christ afresh.” Sciretti summarizes, “as soon as we become *aware* of the sensation, feeling, or thought, we should *ask* for transcendent assistance. This *awareness* and *asking* for help leads to interior freedom; we



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do not violently free ourselves but are freed by the Divine.”

- ▶ *Enlarging the soul.* Watching for sin helps make room in our hearts for enjoying God’s grandeur, “our Soul-satisfying all! our delightful center! and eternal rest!” Dutton called this the “enlargement” of soul that comes when we allow God to fill us. “When we would be something in ourselves, separate from God, we become nothing: nothing that’s good, nothing but evil,” she wrote. “When we are willing to be nothing in ourselves and all in God, we possess being, enjoy the great I AM, and in him possess our own souls.” Sciretti observes: “Have we not had the sensation of feeling interiorly lighter because of awe or because we did not collude with thoughts that were dissonant to our true identity before God? If so, we have experienced the sense of aliveness Dutton expresses.”

Study Questions

1. What does Anne Dutton mean by “watchfulness”? Why is it important in the life of discipleship?
2. How does Dutton describe the goal of the Christian life?
3. Dutton uses “themes from Israel’s story – being in captivity, experiencing the Exodus, wandering in the wilderness, entering the Promised Land, being sent into Exile, returning to the restored Jerusalem – to describe...spiritual growth,” Sciretti notes. Discuss how the Apostle Paul employs these themes in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13, and how William Williams uses them in “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah.”

Departing Hymn: “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah” (vv. 1, 2, and 4)

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy pow’rful hand.
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
feed me till I want no more;
feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain,
whence the healing stream doth flow;
let the fire and cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield,
be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside;
bear me through the swelling current,
Land me safe on Canaan’s side;
Songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever give to thee,
I will ever give to thee.

William Williams (1745); trans. by Peter Williams (1771), alt.
Tune: CWM RHONDDA

† *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks*, 11.34, translated by Benedicta Ward (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003), 125.



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Focus Article:

📖 The Triumph of the Eye
(*Women and the Church*, pp.
37-46)

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The Triumph of the Eye

In a society ever more determined by the visual appeal of things, men begin to desire women who conform to a certain shape and look perpetually young. Women, in turn, strive to conform to eye-driven male desire. How can we reshape imagination to prefer spiritual vision to mere sight?

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 31:10-31

Reflection

C. S. Lewis diagnosed a familiar pattern of sexual desire of our time. In *The Screwtape Letters*, he has the demon Screwtape introduce his sub-demon Wormwood to a subtler strategy for undermining chastity: the devils will strive to make “the role of the eye in sexuality more and more important [while] at the same time making its demands more and more impossible.” Screwtape explains how it works: “We now teach men to like women whose bodies are scarcely distinguishable from those of boys.” Meanwhile, the demons prompt women to please men by wearing clothes that “make them appear firmer and more slender and more boyish than nature allows a full-grown woman to be.”

This “eye-dominated dream-model” of beauty we covet in imagination is distorting our sexuality – dangerously twisting what men expect of women and, when they internalize the expectations of the “male gaze,” what women expect of themselves. Ralph Wood gives this example: “A friend of mine found his thirteen-year old daughter’s diary lying open in such a fashion as to invite her father’s inspection. There he found these words scrawled in large letters: ‘I despise my body.’ Unable to make her teenaged figure approximate the proverbial Coke-bottle shape, this woman-child has had her self-worth shattered. She has been virtually crushed by the desire for a false bodily conformity that has been imposed on her and that she has embraced without knowing it.”

Contrast the “capable wife” described in Proverbs 31. Behind the long list of her wifely duties – which will strike us as another culture-restricted role – the sage invites us to glimpse this woman’s amazing self-confidence, her true “capableness.” We cannot help but admire that “Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come” (31:25). When she articulates this “wisdom” and teaches “kindness” to others, she does not blindly follow cultural expectations, but is guided by a greater truth she sees and welcomes as she “fears the LORD” (31:26, 30).

If we are to overcome the demonic “ocular deceit” about sexuality today, Wood suggests, we must restore our spiritual vision. In “mere sight,” we perceive just the “outward and visible and often ephemeral” features of people – their glamour, wealth, power, and position. “If, by contrast, we see *through* our eyes, with lenses formed by true convictions about God and man and the world, then we have *vision*. We can discern what is not apparent, what is not obvious, but what is indeed ultimately valuable. Especially can we recognize the true beauty of women.”

Wood finds these resources in the Christian tradition for restoring our spiritual vision:



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- ▶ *Scripture distinguishes vision from mere sight.* “While the Bible downplays raw naked sight, it elevates revelatory vision,” Wood says. No one can see God and live (Exodus 33:20, etc.), yet Moses finds God in a burning bush and dense smoke on Mount Sinai, Job hears God’s voice in a whirlwind, Isaiah discerns the Lord in the Temple, and people with ears to hear and eyes to see, encounter God in Christ’s parables. Based on biblical teachings (cf. Matthew 5:8; 1 Timothy 6:16; 1 Corinthians 13:12), theologians say the “Beatific Vision” is a privilege in Paradise. This “direct and unmediated sight of the Lord in all his goodness and glory is the happy purpose for which humanity was created...for God to behold us as creatures who have been redeemed by his grace, so that we, in turn, might be able ‘to know God and to enjoy him forever.’”
- ▶ *Icons of the Virgin Mary exhibit her true feminine beauty,* often by depicting dark half-circles under her eyes. “These signs of her suffering actually enhance her beauty,” Wood notes. “They reveal that she is no shallow and superficial maiden, but rather a woman of immense character and quality – precisely because she has declared her ultimate ‘Yes’ to God himself, even at the cost of immense grief and distress.”
- ▶ *John Donne helps us discern beauty.* In a tribute to the womanly beauty of Lady Magdalen Herbert, the poet says, “No spring, nor summer beauty hath such grace,” for in the very lines of her face, Love dwells. “Here, where still evening is, not noon, nor night; / where no voluptuousness, yet all delight. / In all her words, unto all hearers fit, / you may at revels, you at counsel, sit.” Wood explains, “Neither sultry nor seductive, Lady Magdalen’s beauty is suffused with a gentle delight.... What matters now is not her looks so much as her speech, for she both embodies and articulates the wisdom that provides apt advice to all who come to listen, whether it be youth who need restraint from their riotous revels, or adults who need her counsel in discerning the beauty that comes with age.”

Donne’s poem and Orthodox icons of the Virgin Mary can reshape our mind and imagination to “behold true feminine beauty...in the voice of wisdom and companionship rather than the shape of the hourglass,” Wood concludes. We may find such “autumnal beauty” even “in young women imbued with moral seriousness. Creased with the care of both love and sorrow, it is a beauty that can finally behold even God face to face.”

Study Questions

1. What signs do you notice of “the triumph of the eye,” of our being increasingly influenced by the visual appeal of things? How is it reshaping relationships between men and women?
2. Discuss the distinction Ralph Wood draws between spiritual vision and sight. How do we develop spiritual vision?
3. What resources for developing spiritual vision of feminine beauty does Wood find in Scripture and Christian art? Are there other resources that would you suggest?

Departing Hymn: “The Sacred Now”



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Focus Articles:

- 📖 Mary and the Women from Galilee
(*Women and the Church*, pp. 50-57)

- 📖 What Should We Say about Mary?
(*Women and the Church*, pp. 88-93)

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What Should We Say about Mary?

As Protestants show new interest in the mother of Christ, they often think they need to have something to say *about* Mary, rather than *to* her. Why not begin with the first words spoken both *to* and *about* Mary from God's own messenger, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28)? If we offer this as an address, rather than a theological proposition, we might begin to understand more fully what it means to honor Mary.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:26-45

Meditation †

The Archangel was not foretelling the future by saying "The Lord is with thee," but was declaring what he saw happening invisibly at that time. Perceiving that divine and human gifts of grace were to be found in Mary, and that she was adorned with all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, he truly proclaimed her full of grace. He saw that she had already received to dwell within her the One in whom are all these treasures of grace....Even if other women may be extolled, no other can be magnified with the surpassing glory of the Virgin Mother of God.

Gregory Palamas (1296-1359)

Reflection

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman," the Apostle Paul wrote, "so that we might receive adoption as children" of God (Galatians 4:4-5). Each phrase of that simple good news, he believed, is a wonderful mystery to be savored – not because it leaves us in mystery-mongering darkness, but because it sheds new light, and much more than we can comprehend, upon God, ourselves, and the world. Consider that phrase "born of a woman." How amazing it is that God entered the world as a baby, totally dependent on a young woman and her beau for nourishment, training, and love. How amazing that the two of them – Mary and Joseph – were up to the task!

In the Orthodox tradition, Mary is often called the *Theotokos*, the Mother of God. Orthodox theologian Gregory Palamas noted that Mary was chosen for this honor not because she had perfected herself, but because she was "full of grace" – fully welcoming of and prepared by God's abundant love.

In "Mary and the Women of Galilee," Heidi Hornik describes Giotto's frescoes in the Arena Chapel in Padua, Italy, which depict events in the lives of Joachim and Anna (Mary's parents), Mary, and Christ. Though several scenes in Giotto's iconographic program are apocryphal – filling in the 'blanks' left by biblical accounts of Mary – all are designed to lead viewers to worship the God who graced Mary. Hornik highlights two paintings:

- ▶ In *The Flight into Egypt*, Giotto makes Mary the central figure, a departure from the gospel account that focuses on Joseph (Matthew 2:13-15). A guiding angel looks directly at Mary. "Her strength as she holds Jesus on her lap is immediately conveyed to the viewer," Hornik notes. "Giotto portrays Mary as protector of the Christ Child and, by extension of the Church. The overtly



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grand stature of Mary is reminiscent of altar panels depicting the Madonna and Child enthroned.”

- ▶ *The Lamentation* depicts the three Marys grieving over Jesus’ body after it had been taken from the cross. Though this traditional scene is apocryphal, it includes details from biblical accounts. “Mary, the mother of Jesus, wearing a deep aquamarine gown, holds the head and upper body of Jesus across her lap. This detail of the painting also recalls the *pietà* tradition of Mary mourning over the body of Jesus, another popular apocryphal subject,” Hornik writes. “Giotto created a new kind of pictorial space in *Lamentation*...[pushing] the entire narrative into the frontal plane, directly confronting the viewer with the monumentality and emotion of the scene.”

“Only time will tell if the current buzz about Mary among Protestants will produce any fruit,” Carole Baker concludes. Will they rejoin the history of Christian whose knowledge of Mary does not come “through rational assent to doctrines or dogmas, but rather through a relationship” with the Mother of God?

Study Questions

1. Compare Giotto’s *The Flight into Egypt* with the biblical account in Matthew 2:13-15.
2. Come Giotto’s *The Lamentation* to the gospel stories about the women present at Jesus’ crucifixion and burial.
3. How might you *honor* Mary in your congregation, if you do not accept official doctrines of Mariology?

Departing Hymn: “The Women’s Hymn” (vv. 1, 2, and 4)

Come, women, wide proclaim
life through your Savior slain;
sing evermore.
Christ, God’s effulgence bright,
Christ, who arose in might,
Christ, who crowns you with light,
praise and adore.

Work with your courage high,
sing of the daybreak nigh,
your love outpour.
Stars shall your brow adorn,
your heart leap with the morn,
and, by his love upborne,
hope and adore.

Then when the garnered field
shall to our Master yield
a bounteous store,
Christ, hope of all the meek,
Christ, whom all the earth shall seek,
Christ your reward shall speak,
joy evermore.

Fannie E. S. Heck (1913)

Tune: ITALIAN HYMN

† Gregory Palamas, *Mary the Mother of God*, edited by Christopher Veniamin (South Canaan, PA: Mount Thabor Publishing, 2005), 55.

Appendix: Optional Lesson Plans for Teachers

For each study guide we offer two or three optional lesson plans followed by detailed suggestions on using the material in the study guide:

- ▶ An *abridged lesson plan* outlines a lesson suitable for a beginning Bible study class or a brief group session.
- ▶ A *standard lesson plan* outlines a more thorough study.
- ▶ For some guides a *dual session lesson plan* divides the study guide material so that the group can explore the topic in two meetings.

Each lesson plan is for a 30- to 45-minute meeting, with about one-third of the time being set aside for worship.

Recovering Discarded Images

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>	<i>Dual Session (#1)</i>	<i>Dual Session (#2)</i>
Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading	Job 38:1-11	Exodus 3:1-15
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)	Explore female images for God in Scripture	Discuss theological significance of female images of God in prayer and worship
Questions 1, 4, and 6	Questions (selected)	Questions 1, 2, and 3	Questions 4, 5, and 6
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To consider why the Bible includes a variety of metaphors or images, which cannot be taken literally or alone, to describe God.
2. To explore some of the female images for God in Scripture.
3. To discuss how we can incorporate these female images for God in our prayer and worship.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide.

Distribute copies of *Women and the Church (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting.

Begin with a Comment

“God has created each one of us, every human being, for greater things – to love and to be loved,” Mother Theresa (1910-1997) has written. “But why did God make some of us men and others women? Because a woman’s love is one image of the love of God, and a man’s love is another image of God’s love. Both are created to love, but each in a different way. Woman and man complete each other, and together show forth God’s love more fully than either can do it alone.” (Mother Teresa, *A Message For The World Conference On Women, Beijing, China, 1995*)

How then could Scripture describe the full extent and texture of God’s love, except through a variety of images, both masculine and feminine?

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to help members faithfully interpret and employ the rich variety of biblical metaphors for the divine.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Job 38:1-11 from a modern translation.

Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Reflection

This discussion surveys the feminine metaphors for God in the Bible. Kristina LaCelle-Peterson refers to them as “discarded images” because we often overlook them when we study Scripture, failing to let them enrich our understanding of God and draw us into deeper relationship with God. LaCelle-Peterson’s suggestion that we gradually restore the use of these images in our prayer and worship may raise several concerns – to follow

Jesus' instructions on prayer, to maintain an orthodox view of the Trinitarian nature of God, and to uncritically endorse elements of contemporary culture. Prayerfully consider her responses to each of these concerns, and encourage members to discuss any related worries that they may have.

You might extend this discussion to two sessions. In one, explore some of the female images for God in the Bible. In the other session, discuss how these images can be integrated into personal and congregational prayer and worship.

Study Questions

1. Invite three small groups to review how masculine and feminine images of God are balanced to make the same point in each of the following passages. Isaiah 42:10-17 is a psalm inviting all people to praise God for leading the people out of exile and away from idolatry; God's determination is like the shouting warrior and the mother crying out in childbirth. The parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin in Luke 15:1-10 depict God's determination to seek out and care for wayward individuals. Luke 13:18-21 (cf. the parallel passage in Matthew 13:31-33) depicts God's patience in bringing forth the kingdom, like a farmer (typically a man's employment in the ancient world) who plants a tiny seed and tends a fragile plant, or a woman carefully works a bit of yeast into a lump of dough in order to make bread.
2. Assign several groups to study the distinctive roles of female imagery for God in these passages. In Deuteronomy 32:18, female imagery expresses a major theme in "the song of Moses," that Yahweh is "the Rock" (Deuteronomy 32:18; cf. 32:4, 15, 30-31) who is radically different from other so-called deities. Hosea 11:3-4 develops a similar theme. Elsewhere female images for God encourage our humble obedience to God as to a loving mother (Psalm 131:2), describe God's comforting presence (Isaiah 66:13a), and characterize Jesus Christ's deep love for rebellious Jerusalem (Luke 13:34).
3. "Birth and nursing imagery, rather than being embarrassing or beneath God in some way, were worthy comparisons to emphasize the intimacy of God's connection to and care for us," LaCelle-Peterson observes. She finds it "ironic that in our era the people most comfortable calling themselves 'born again' Christians are most opposed to picturing God as the mother who birthed them, the one who gave this born again experience."
4. Recall that metaphors help us both *understand* God and *encounter* God. Restricting ourselves to masculine images for God may distort our comprehension of God and mislead us to think that women are not as able as men to bear God's image in the world. Also, it will become more difficult for us to draw near to God experientially if we reduce God to our human father's limitations or to the culture's limited ideal of male parents.
5. Ancient Israel was continually tempted to confuse Yahweh with the polytheistic deities worshiped by their neighbors. The latter were limited sexualized beings that favored a particular nation, and produced other creatures and elements of the world out of themselves through an act of procreation. Instead the biblical writers inspired the related ideas that God is distinguished from and transcends the entire universe as its creator, and that God rules over and judges all nations. Encourage members to discuss how we are tempted today to reduce God to a cultural projection, a national figurehead, to someone we can control, etc.
6. Discuss LaCelle-Peterson's responses to concerns that we should follow Jesus' instruction to address God as "Our Father" in prayer, endorse the creedal formulation of the Trinity as "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," and not endorse uncritically contemporary feminist analyses of religion. Members may raise additional concerns about employing the biblical female images for God, such as that these images may distract some people from worship, be misinterpreted in the context of New Age thought, or encourage the uncritical use of non-biblical images. How might you address these concerns in your congregation?

Departing Hymn

"The Sacred Now" can be found on pp. 65-67 of *Women and the Church*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Female Preaching in Early Nineteenth Century America

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

- 1, To sketch the story of evangelical women preachers during the Second Great Awakening.
- 2, To consider how the wider culture has influenced how Christians interpret Scripture in regard to the role of women in ministry.
3. To outline a thoughtful Christian feminism that is consistent with biblical authority for the life of discipleship.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Women and the Church (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "The Women's Hymn" locate the familiar tune ITALIAN HYMN in your church's hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with a Story

"Some argued that Harriet Livermore was 'bold and shameless,' a disgrace to her family and to the evangelical movement," Catherine Brekus notes. "Others insisted that she was the 'instrument of God,' a humble woman who had given up everything for Christ.

"...She was the daughter of a congressman and the grand-daughter of a senator, but after an emotional conversion experience, she renounced her privileged life in order to become a female preacher. Reputed to be a gifted evangelist who was also a beautiful singer, she became so popular that she was allowed to preach in front of Congress four times between 1827 and 1844, each time to huge crowds....

As if she knew that she would be forgotten one day, Harriet Livermore described herself as a 'stranger and a pilgrim,' an outsider in a culture that failed to recognize women as the religious equals of men.... Although Livermore never lost her faith that she and other evangelical women would someday 'receive the promises,' she also knew that the Christian life was filled with sacrifice and suffering. In 1868, at the age of eighty, she died alone and penniless in an almshouse in Pennsylvania, and in accordance with her wishes, she was buried in an unmarked grave." (*Women and the Church*, 20 and 28-29).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God for discernment regarding the role of Christian women in ministry today.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Acts 2:1-21 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

This discussion recalls the ministry of women preachers during what scholars call “the Second Great Awakening,” a period of Christian revivals that spread from New England through the Midwest and South between 1790 and the 1840s. In this era after the American Revolution, evangelical religious groups flourished as state legislatures disestablished the colonial churches and people migrated from the original colonies into the western territories. Enhance this study with stories about these amazing women in Catherine Brekus’ article, “Female Preaching in the Early Nineteenth-Century,” or her book, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

As Gretchen Ziegenhals explains in “Women in Ministry: Beyond the Impasse,” many evangelicals continue to debate whether certain leadership roles are off-limits to women. Encourage members to relate the story of these early women preachers to the contemporary debate between “complementarians” (who believe that men and women have different, complementary, God-ordained roles in the Church and home) and “egalitarians” (who believe men and women have been equally gifted for leadership roles).

Study Questions

1. Catherine Brekus notes that as evangelical churches became part of “the establishment” (not in the technical sense of being supported by government funds, but in the *de facto* manner of being the gathering place of social “insiders,” having more institutional prestige, and exercising greater public influence), they began to adopt the gender relationships in the educational, political, and economic systems of the society. That is, the churches took on the ethos of the wider American society, and were less separate and distinctive communities. Gradually, the evangelicals’ educational systems, church organizations, and worship styles became more like those of churches that had been established and wealthy in the colonial era.
2. Discuss why evangelical churches encouraged women preachers during the revival era, but shut them out later. This history was repeated in the twentieth century. Early in the century, holiness churches (descended from Methodism) and other evangelicals encouraged women preachers. Yet, Gretchen Ziegenhals notes, “while evangelical churches historically were committed to women in ministry at a time when more theologically liberal churches were not, in the last sixty years that trend has been reversed. ...[Among] the reasons for this reversal [are] the cultural tendency in the 1950s to restrict women to the private sphere, the evangelical reaction to First Wave Feminism, and a shift in how biblical evidence is weighed.”
3. Gretchen Ziegenhals writes that Christian feminists (in the words of Lynn Japinga) are committed “to the humanity, dignity, and equality of all persons. They seek equal rights for women, but their ultimate goal is a social order in which women and men of all races and classes can live together in justice and harmony.” Christian feminists depart from other forms of feminism in two ways: (1) they ground their commitment in “the theological assertion that all people are created in God’s image and therefore are valuable, gifted, free, and responsible,” and (2) their motivation is not to gain personal power, but to help the Church be true to the spirit of egalitarianism that Christ embodies.

Christian feminists do not reject scriptural authority, but read the Bible in light of women’s experience. “We can look to texts about women in the Bible to understand the lives of women today, and we can look at our lives today to fill in the gaps about the experiences of biblical women,” Ziegenhals notes. “I understand more about the bent-over woman in Luke 13:10-17 and the nature of what might have oppressed her, when I consider the experiences of my grandmother, a hardworking immigrant who was bent over from years of hard work, which included hunching over a sewing machine to earn a living for her family.”

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Anne Dutton as a Spiritual Director

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

1. To introduce the spiritual writings of Anne Dutton.
2. To understand the central role of the practice of watchfulness in the life of discipleship.
3. To consider how Dutton employed a moral interpretation of Israel's story to interpret the Christian journey toward joy.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Women and the Church (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah" locate the familiar tune CWM RHONDDA in your church's hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with a Story

When Howell Harris, leader of the eighteenth-century Methodist revival in Wales, urged Anne Dutton to write a tract to strongly reprimand "backsliding" Christians, she accepted the commission but refused to write as sharply as he expected. When we give correction, she said, "there needs a great deal of spiritual wisdom, to cry aloud against sin without wounding the faith of God's dear Children, as to their interest in Christ and his salvation." "If we are too condemnatory, we might unintentionally wound "some of God's hidden ones that he would have comforted and helped."

When Christians sin, Satan seizes the opportunity to tempt them to "unbelief, to question their interest in Christ; and thereby drives them into more ungodliness," Dutton believed. In contrast, God "first commends what is good in them, and then shows them what is evil."

Michael Sciretti observes that Dutton "attempted to heal counselees' souls and strengthen their faith so as to lead them to obedience and holiness. Repentance, according to Dutton, must be grounded in one's relationship with God and should flow from faith and love, not fear and anxiety." (*Women and the Church*, p. 33)

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by thanking God for spiritual friends who give us guidance and correction in the life of discipleship.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

This study introduces two themes – watchfulness for sin and enlargement of soul – in the theology of Anne Dutton (1692-1765), the remarkable British Baptist woman whose private letters and tracts were very influential during the early years of the Evangelical Revival. A few samples of her writings are available online at www.gracegems.org/Dutton/Dutton.htm.

"I am drawn to Anne Dutton's spiritual theology because, though it echoes the language of previous Christian mystics, it is always mediated by the words and images of Scripture," Michael Sciretti reports. "In her spiritual direction, Dutton shared the knowledge that such mystical experience (with the aid of Baptist communities of interpretation) had taught her."

Study Questions

1. The practice of watchfulness involves identifying, resisting, and through God's grace removing the desires and thoughts that prevent us from experiencing joy in God's presence in our lives. We become guilty (and we form enslaving habits) when we *consent* to blasphemous, angry, anxious, or unbelieving fantasies or ideas that come into our minds, and then we *act* on them by mistreating others or rejecting God's love. Dutton does not encourage us to struggle against such thoughts and desires (because this indicates we are 'going it alone' without God), but to "venture on Christ afresh" and seek his gracious help.
2. The goal of discipleship is to make room in our hearts for enjoying God. Dutton sees sin as a *contraction* of the soul—a limiting of what we can know, love, and enjoy. Our happiness depends on the *enlargement* of the soul to welcome God and God's glories. She describes this contraction as a form of self-limiting selfishness: "When we would be something in ourselves, separate from God, we become nothing...." The enlargement comes through humility that gets our focus off of ourselves: "the lower we sink to nothing in ourselves, the lighter we rise to Being in God, and the more our holiness and happiness increaseth." Sciretti writes: "We should not quickly skip over these metaphors of contraction and enlargement of soul, possessing Being, or becoming lighter. They reflect visceral experiences. Consenting to a passing feeling of anger, jealousy, or sadness causes us to become passive to it, contracting something in us, causing us to feel heavy or burdened inside and seemingly possessed by the feeling. Have we not had the sensation of feeling interiorly lighter because of awe or because we did not collude with thoughts that were dissonant to our true identity before God? If so, we have experienced the sense of aliveness Dutton expresses."
3. The Apostle Paul corrects a number of practices in the Corinthian church by the so-called "strong," "spiritual," or "wise" members, ranging from eating food offered to idols to sexual immorality. In 1 Corinthians 10:1-13, he indirectly alludes to symbols and incidents from Israel's Exodus and wilderness experiences—crossing the sea (10:1), experiencing God's presence symbolized in a cloud (10:1-2), and eating food and drink miraculously supplied by God (10:3-5). Biblical stories of these incidents are in Exodus 13:21; 14:22; 16:4-35; 17:6; and Numbers 20:7-11. Paul warns that even those people who were blessed to be led and cared for by God directly fell into idol worship, sexual immorality, and factional complaining, and he concludes, "Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did" (10:6). In the meditation, Amma Syncletica, a leading fourth-century Christian monastic woman, restates Paul's point as a call to "watchfulness."

William Williams (1717-1791) was a well-known singer and preacher in Wales during the Evangelical Revival. In verses 1 and 2 of "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah," he alludes to the same wilderness episodes as Paul did. The Christian life of discipleship is like being a "pilgrim in this barren land." In verse 4, he anticipates the consummation of the Christian journey on analogy with the people of Israel's arriving at the River Jordan and crossing, once again with God's miraculous help, into the promised land of Canaan. While Williams invites us to construe the Christian life as a perilous journey fraught with "anxious fears," he focuses on God's gracious help ("Bread of heaven" and "Strong Deliverer") at each step along the way.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

The Triumph of the Eye

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 2 and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To examine how we are increasingly influenced by the visual appeal of things, and how this distorts relationships between men and women.
2. To distinguish spiritual vision from mere sight in the perception of beauty in each person.
3. To consider resources in Scripture and Christian art for training our capacity for spiritual vision.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Women and the Church (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

Martha Croker, a character in Tom Wolfe's novel *A Man in Full* (1998), is a thoroughly modern woman who is deeply anxious to satisfy the eye-driven sexual desire of men today. Ralph Wood explains, "She is the fifty-three-year old ex-wife of Charlie Croker, an ageing real estate developer whose trophy wife Serena is half Charlie's age. Recognizing that, alas, she will never again have the filly-like appearance of Serena, Martha reflects on the younger women at the health club where she works fiercely at her own aerobic exercises: 'They had nice wide shoulders and nice narrow hips and nice lean legs and fine definition in the muscles of their arms and backs. They were built like boys, boys with breasts and hurricane manes.' Wolfe continues, 'Only vigorous exercise could help you even remotely approach the feminine ideal of today — a *Boy with Breasts!* ... The exercise salons were proliferating like cellular telephones and CD-ROMs. *Boys with breasts!*' Wolfe the deft satirist uses this phrase in witty mockery, knowing all too well that it is the eye-dominated dream-model that haunts many American women." (*Women and the Church*, 38)

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God for spiritual vision to see the beauty he created in each person we meet.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Proverbs 31:10-31 from a modern translation.

Reflection

This study is a critique of the current ideal of feminine beauty in our society, in which men increasingly judge women by their superficial visual appeal. This ideal, Ralph Wood suggests, is one manifestation of what C. S. Lewis called "the triumph of the eye." Wood says a Christian remedy must involve the cultivation of spiritual vision, which is different from the mere sight of things. We must retrain our imagination, as well as our minds, for the perception of true beauty in persons. For this, he turns to Christian art — the Orthodox icons of the Vir

gin Mary and John Donne's *Elegy IX, The Autumnal*. Before your group meeting, download a sample of these icons and the complete version of Donne's poem from the Internet.

Study Questions

1. Ralph Wood notes, "We receive the world almost entirely through the projection of images onto screens – whether they are located on our computers, our televisions, or at the cinema." Do we evaluate people by their visual publicity, or desire things because of visual advertising? Most celebrities are people we have "seen" nicely photographed in magazines, movies, or on television, rather than merely heard about from trusted friends. We call them "the pretty people." Television "reality" shows depict attractive individuals who make good "first impressions," and try to convince us we really "know" them after a few episodes. Advertisers deploy arresting images to shape our desires, luring us to purchase products that are visually attractive or are associated in the advertisements with pretty people and places.

From grade school, boys are encouraged to "size up" girls by their "looks," and young women are pressured to conform to the "male gaze." "The giant success of the American cosmetic surgery business is a marker of...the demonic triumph of the eye," Wood suggests, for the "most common of these so-called 'aesthetic' procedures for women are mammoplasty (breast augmentation), lipoplasty (body contouring), blepharoplasty (eyelid lifting), abdominoplasty ("tummy tuck"), and breast reduction." While eating disorders (bulimia and anorexia) are not simply responses to eye-driven male desire, they often manifest in an obsessive fear of gaining weight. "A friend reports spending more than \$100,000 for his daughter's four collegiate years of psychiatric treatment for bulimia – all because her boyfriend complained that she was fat. The poor girl would have done better to dump her lover."

2. In mere sight, "we see *with* our eyes, using them as mere optical instruments" to notice "only of the outward and visible and often ephemeral" aspects of people and things. By contrast, with spiritual vision "we see *through* our eyes, with lenses formed by true convictions about God and man and the world.... We can discern what is not apparent, what is not obvious, but what is indeed ultimately valuable."

Even mere sight require some training on how to observe, what to notice, etc. (Consider that we must learn to see football team's alignments, identify individual human twins, and notice dim galaxies through a modest telescope.) But spiritual vision involves much more training, as we learn to use central truths to interpret everyday events correctly, evaluate our possible actions rightly, and recognize what is really beautiful about people and things.

3. In Scripture, Wood finds a paradox: no one can "see" God, yet people have visions of God. The divine presence is veiled in such a way that only those who desire and love God can "find" God through their experience. Several passages suggest the theological idea of a "Beatific Vision," the promise that we will behold God "face to face" in Paradise when we have a "pure heart" cleansed by God's grace of all deceit and sin.

In John Donne's poem, *Elegy IX, The Autumnal*, and the Orthodox icons of the Virgin Mary, Wood finds depictions of feminine beauty through arresting words and images, which challenge the eye-dominated ideal of beauty in our society. These works of art point to the beauty of character that is deeply formed by love for God and others and the world, and by suffering with them. If time permits, review Wood's summary of Donne's poem.

Ask members to share other resources – works of art (paintings, poetry, novels, stories, musical performances, television series), biblical stories, biographies of saints, or spiritual writings that make them look more closely at things, shape their imagination, and redirect their thinking about what is beautiful. (I'm haunted by a brief testimony by a "simple" young man in a twenty-something's church class thirty years ago: as he walked to church through the new canyons of skyscrapers in downtown Houston, he had been intensely aware of God's beauty. While I've never had *that* spiritual experience, his testimony keeps reminding me to look past the obvious and reflect on how the physical arrangement of space is influencing my perception of God.) Discuss how your congregation can use such resources in worship and study to develop members' spiritual vision of feminine beauty.

Departing Hymn

"The Sacred Now" can be found on pp. 65-67 of *Women and the Church*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

What Should We Say about Mary?

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To study Giotto's frescoes *The Flight into Egypt* and *The Lamentation* in relation to the biblical stories on which they are based.
2. To consider how we should honor Mary in our Christian discipleship.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Women and the Church (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "The Women's Hymn" locate the familiar tune ITALIAN HYMN in your church's hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with a Story

"In 2000, I began my seminary education at a Protestant seminary. The first semester I signed up for a course in Catholic Moral Theology," Carole Baker recalls. When the class gathered to discuss a book entitled *Mary: Mirror of the Church*, "the room was completely silent. This was not typical for this group of young, eager theologians who all semester long had come to class eagerly awaiting their moment to share their profound theological insights. Finally a young man broke the silence professing, "I just don't know what to do with Mary." This confession prompted other similar confessions and I sat in amazement as I listened to these bright, articulate Protestants attempt to convey their befuddlement when encountering the Lord's mother.

When I returned home for Christmas, just days after the semester's close, this moment still haunted me. And when my great aunt, also a Protestant, asked me casually and without any prompting at Christmas dinner, "Why did Protestants get rid of Mary?" my own silence and befuddlement marked the beginning of what has now become a longstanding fascination with Mary's role in the Christian Church." (*Women and the Church*, 88-89).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by thanking God for Mary and for her faithfulness in conceiving and bearing Jesus Christ.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Luke 1:26-45 from a modern translation.

Reflection

This study focuses on Giotto's frescoes *The Flight into Egypt* and *The Lamentation* (reproduced in grayscale in *Women and the Church*, 50 and 56), and their relation to biblical accounts of the events they depict. Before the group meeting, download color photographs of these two paintings from the Internet. The artist's honoring of Mary raises the larger question of how we should honor Mary today. In "What Should We Say about Mary?" Carole Baker reviews three books on the resurgent interest among Protestants in the Mother of our Lord. En-

courage members to discuss their experiences in regard to Mary, and to explore ways of honoring Mary that are consistent with their Christian discipleship.

Study Questions

1. Before discussing Heidi Hornik's reflection on Giotto's *The Flight into Egypt*, ask members to close their eyes and visualize the holy family's flight to Egypt as you read Matthew 2:13-15. Invite them to share what they have imagined. Perhaps Joseph is the main character, there are only three travelers, and they are walking (or running) through the night. Now notice how Giotto elaborates the biblical narrative. Mary is the central figure in the painting. She regally rides on a donkey and holds Jesus on her lap. "Joseph is deemphasized on the right side of the composition: while he turns in conversation with a member of the apocryphal entourage, the guiding angel looks directly at Mary," Hornik writes. "Giotto uses monumental rock forms [as he does in *The Lamentation*] to accentuate the primary action and direct the viewer's attention: the pyramidal form of the rock frames the Madonna and Child."
2. Assign four groups to study the gospel accounts in Matthew 27:55-61, Mark 15:40-47, Luke 23:48-56, and John 19:38-42. Who are the women, according to the Synoptic Gospels, present at the crucifixion and burial of Jesus? According to the Gospel of John, who prepares Jesus' body for burial? Do any of the Gospels describe the lamentation scene that Giotto depicts?

In Giotto's painting, "Mary, the mother of Jesus, wearing a deep aquamarine gown, holds the head and upper body of Jesus across her lap. This detail of the painting also recalls the *pietà* tradition of Mary mourning over the body of Jesus, another popular apocryphal subject in art," Hornik writes. "Mary Magdalene, who is identified by her red drapery and long flowing hair, sits with the feet of Christ in her lap. The other Mary, wearing a halo, leans over the body of Christ between the other Marys and below John the Beloved. In tradition the beloved disciple is identified with John the Evangelist, the author of the fourth Gospel, and visually represented as a youth who lack facial hair. The long line of the barren rock, perhaps ending in a tomb to the right and outside the border of the painting, leads the viewer's eye back to the intimate exchange between Mary and Christ. The angels in the air above, each with a unique expression of grief (wringing their hands, twisting and turning in various directions), heighten the drama of the death."

Hornik describes the composition of "large simple forms, strong and emotional grouping of figures, and the limited depth" in the fresco. "Giotto created a new kind of pictorial space in *Lamentation*. Instead of depicting details of the story in a way that forces one to look from one segment of the painting to another, he pushed the entire narrative into the frontal plane, directly confronting the viewer with the monumentality and emotion of the scene."

3. The doctrines of Mariology (the theological study of Mary) in the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican churches evolved over the years through reflection the biblical narratives, saint's experiences, regional practices, and official pronouncements. The differences between these three churches, which largely agree, and Protestants, who share no official doctrines about Mary, are a difficult reminder of division within the Body of Christ. The Roman Catholic Church recognized these four doctrines about Mary: (1) She was perpetually a virgin before, during, and after the birth of Jesus; (2) she is truly the Mother of God (Council of Ephesus in 431); (3) she herself was immaculately conceived without original sin (pronouncement of Pope Pius IX in 1854); and (4) she was assumed body and soul into heaven at the end of her earthly life (pronouncement of Pope Pius XII in 1950).

Each Protestant congregation might honor Mary with a special day to reflect on the biblical stories of her faithfulness and love. Baker suggests we might talk to Mary (not pray to her) as we might speak to a dead loved one whom we feel as present with us.

Departing Hymn