

Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother: Two Gods or One?

David Burton
January 22, 2018



In *Divine Principle*, one of the first principles in Chapter 1, "The Principle of Creation," is that of resemblance whereby we deduce things about the characteristics of God from common characteristics of everything we observe. That we observe male and female beings suggests that God as described by Divine Principle is a God of both masculinity and femininity in a way quite different to the traditional Christian view of God.

However, until relatively recently we have inherited our common operating perception of God directly from Christianity and prayed to a Heavenly Father, not a Heavenly Mother. Then, five years

ago, Mrs. Hak Ja Han Moon asked us to start to pray to Heavenly Parent rather than Heavenly Father. For me this was a sea change and wakeup call to the fact that the view of God in Divine Principle is not the traditional Christian view of God.



David Burton

My wife picked up on this first and often had to remind me who I was praying to during family prayers. Coming from a Christian culture praying to a Heavenly Father was totally ingrained for me and a new word for God quite disconcerting at first. Praying to Heavenly Parent is significantly different because it also acknowledges the Divine Feminine presence in the Godhead. It pushes us to come to grips with the content of Divine Principle that suggests God is both male and female.

Since 2013, there has been a growing awareness within Unificationism that we need to deal with God as Heavenly Mother as well as Heavenly Father.

Personally coming to accept God also as Heavenly Mother has been part and parcel of my accepting Mother Moon in her leadership role in the church.

Accepting the Divine Feminine is not without issues of its own, though -- not least of which are the mental ontological contortions involved with imagining how male and female can be combined into one substance.

The underlying reason for this perceptual difficulty is much deeper than personal imagination of a mental image. It goes to the philosophical roots of the Christian tradition. More than just being difficult to imagine, accepting Heavenly Mother in addition to Heavenly Father is in fact ontologically impossible within the context of traditional Christian monotheism.

In this article, I explore why that is so and posit a potential solution based in Divine Principle and science. We accept Divine Principle as a "New Truth" but struggle to articulate exactly how it is new. This issue of Heavenly Mother cuts directly to the core of the newness of Divine Principle.

The Problem of the Traditional Paradigm

It is with good reason Alfred North Whitehead characterized the whole Christian philosophical tradition as footnotes to Plato. Plato's ontology was modified by Aristotle, then adopted by the whole of Christianity as its foundational explanation of existence. In order to outline the traditional paradigm concerning God we must briefly revisit that ontology.

Going back to first principles, both Plato and Aristotle said existing things consist of form and matter. Form is the immaterial idea or pattern of a thing whereas matter is the "stuff" of which things are made. In order to distinguish this concept of matter from concepts of matter that developed later, from this point I will call this first kind of "stuff" *prime matter*.

Prime matter on its own is inert, formless and continuous. It has the potential to become the stuff of any existing being. Form is the active principle that gives shape, even perhaps life and mind, to the formless prime matter much as a seal impresses an image into molten wax.

Plato was the idealist. For him, form was paramount, and he regarded forms as eternal, timeless, and immaterial, existing independently of prime matter in their own realm. Aristotle was the realist. He did

not subscribe to the independent existence of forms. Neither could prime matter be found anywhere by itself independent of form. Nevertheless, Aristotle proposed there was something about an existing being, its substance or essence, beyond that which we could experience of it through our senses. The substance or essence of any existing being is its prime matter plus universal aspects of its form. In this view of form and matter, even normal everyday objects such as a rock or tree necessarily have a supernatural, or formal, component.



Detail of Plato and Aristotle from a fresco, "The School of Athens," by Raphael in the Apostolic Palace in Vatican City.

Christian writers have incorporated this view of existence in terms of form and matter into their theology and philosophy concerning God. Their views still largely dominate our understanding of God today. Two were of particular importance. St. Augustine was Platonic; he transformed Plato's realm of forms into an explanation for God. St. Thomas Aquinas, on the other hand, was Aristotelian. He incorporated Aristotelian substances into theology and philosophy. His influence was so pervasive on Christian theology that substantive ontology became the cornerstone of understanding existence in classical Christian theism. It is still implicitly present in Christian doctrine.

In this substantive ontology, every existing being exists as a combination of substance and attribute. The concept of substance derives from the Aristotelian concept of substance as prime matter plus universal aspects of form. There are three basic types of substance: God, spirit, and matter (not prime matter). Matter has "quantity" or mass and a continuous spatial extension, whereas spirit has "quality" and no spatial extension. God is seen as being beyond space and time so has no extension in either space or time.

Substances are simple, that is, they are not composed of anything simpler, and substances without spatial extension are indivisible. God and spirit are indivisible. Substances can also be personal, so I am a personal substance, you who are reading this are a personal substance. God is also a personal substance and is often equated with spirit or mind. No two substances can occupy the same place at the same time, so God must be wholly distinct from all other substances.

Attributes correspond to the things we can observe about a being. Attributes are said to inhere in the substance and they modify the substance. God, as substance, then also has attributes, and there is quite a long list of the attributes of God. When we say God is eternal, unchanging and absolute, we are talking about attributes of God. With respect to God, however, attributes take on a slightly different meaning than with created beings. God in this substantive ontology is simple and indivisible and is viewed as immaterial mind or spirit that pre-exists the universe and who creates prime matter out of nothing. This simple and indivisible oneness of God means that in God there is no distinction between God's substance and attributes such as we find in created beings. God *is*.

Although masculinity is not normally on the list of attributes of God, the Christian God is also clearly male. As a male being, in the substantive ontology, that masculinity must be either substance or attribute. Consequently, if we now talk about Heavenly Mother in addition to Heavenly Father, we must be postulating two separate Gods, one male and one female. This is true whether masculinity or femininity are attribute or substance. The two cannot coexist as one simple substance in God. That is, in traditional Christian theology and philosophy rooted in form and matter it is not possible to reconcile the existence of both Heavenly Mother and Heavenly Father with monotheism. As we will also see it is also not possible to reconcile it with science or Divine Principle.

Breaking the Paradigm

A serious challenge to the traditional substantive ontology is thrown up by science as it developed through the 19th and 20th centuries, and we can most clearly trace the problem in the history of chemistry.

Chemistry began to be established as a science toward the end of the 18th century with empirical laws such as Antoine Lavoisier's law of conservation of mass in chemical reactions or Joseph Proust's law of constant composition in chemical compounds. John Dalton explained these laws, and expanded on them, by drawing on a different root in Greek philosophy than the Platonic root of Christian philosophical theism. Modernizing the ancient Atomist doctrine of Democritus and Leucippus, he proposed a scientific version that explained the previously established empirical laws. Unlike the indivisible atoms of the Greek Atomists, Dalton's atoms turned out to be divisible and composed of more fundamental elementary particles. However, with this one exception, Dalton's theory still holds true for chemistry today. His

Atomic Theory laid the foundation for chemistry, and much of physics, to develop as a quantitative science. Also, because of its different ontological root, it marks the actual point of separation between science and traditional Christian thought.

Dalton's Atomic Theory was first published around 1804, but he had no experimental evidence for atoms. It was scientifically possible to doubt their existence throughout the 19th century and there were heated debates concerning their existence. Despite this lack of experimental evidence the development of much of chemistry, mechanics, and thermodynamics in the 19th century adopted a particle approach. It took 100 years for experimental evidence of atoms to be supplied by Albert Einstein in his analysis of Brownian motion in 1905.

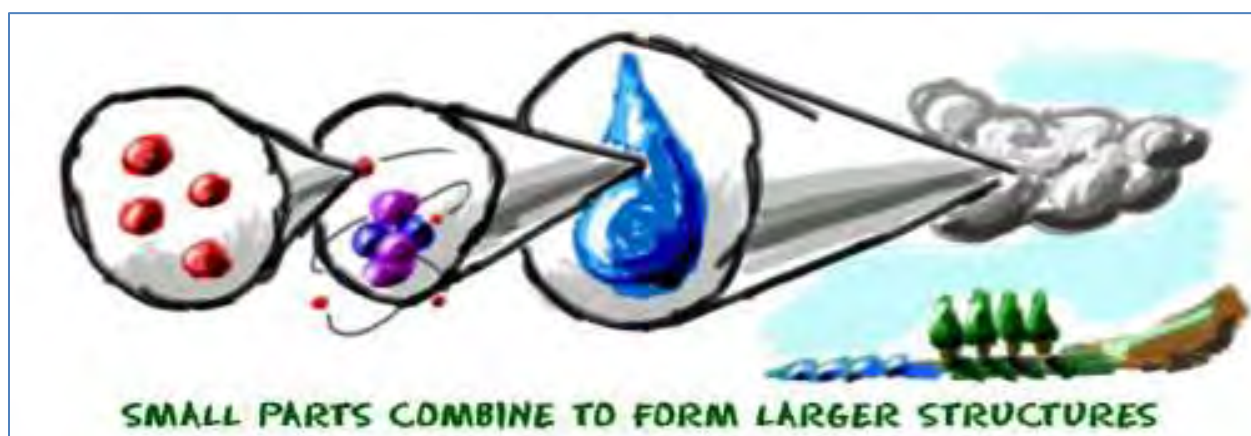
Since Einstein, physics, in its search for the fundamental constituents of the universe, has developed beyond a consideration of simple atoms. Today's scientific controversies in physics surround the interpretation of quantum mechanics and its reconciliation with relativity. Despite this contemporary uncertainty, there is now no scientific controversy concerning the existence of atoms. They have even been imaged in atomic force microscopes.

The experimental proof of atoms was another crucial turning point. Whatever you believe about quantum mechanics or relativity, the scientifically undeniable existence of atoms falsifies the form, prime matter, and substance ontology at the root of Christian thought. There are now no longer material substances continuously spread through space, but rather discrete atoms. In atomic theory, existing beings are all compound beings composed of many types of atoms. They are not the simple substances of traditional thought.

The view of existing beings composed of atoms is mutually exclusive to the view of existing beings in terms of form, prime matter and substance. Throughout the 19th century, this conflict was only at a philosophical level, but with Einstein's proof of atoms putting Atomic theory on a firm experimental footing, the traditional ontology of form, matter, and substance is no longer tenable. Consequently, existing beings cannot be considered to be prime matter shaped by form, and the entire edifice of traditional philosophical theism turns out to be a house built on sand. The foundation in form, matter, and substance has crumbled away, leaving the house with no support. This house of theism must collapse unless we can build a new foundation.

Fortunately, there is the new truth of Divine Principle that can provide that new foundation. *Divine Principle* continues where science leaves off:

"[S]ubatomic particles, the basic building blocks of all matter, possess either a positive charge, a negative charge or a neutral charge formed by the neutralization of positive and negative constituents. When particles join with each other through the reciprocal relationships of their dual characteristics, they form an atom. Atoms, in turn, display either a positive or a negative valence. When the dual characteristics within one atom enter into reciprocal relationships with those in another atom, they form a molecule. Molecules formed in this manner engage in further reciprocal relationships between their dual characteristics to eventually become nourishment fit for consumption by plants and animals."



That is, Divine Principle begins from an ontology based on particles in relationship. There is a hierarchy of particles of increasing complexity from the simple subatomic up to and including complex human beings. The characteristics of masculinity and femininity, then, as in the above quote, are properties of these particles, particularly as they engage in relationship. In this quote we also see that existing beings that we observe are all compound beings composed of layers of relationship.

Further, in its concept of a spirit body that inhabits a spiritual realm Divine Principle adds to the overturning of traditional ontology. For existence based on form and matter, a spirit body is a logical impossibility due to the indivisibility of the substance spirit. Christian ontology also only deals with God and the physical realm. There is no place in the substantive ontology for a spirit realm. Divine Principle

therefore widens the break from traditional thought that was initiated by science. It is a new truth fundamentally because it is based on a new, and scientifically compatible, relational ontology. Since it is compatible with science, it has the potential to save theism from collapse in the face of science.

Heavenly Parent

Science and Divine Principle together show us that all the basic understandings of matter, spirit, and God that we inherit from Christianity are inherently suspect and are almost certainly wrong. There is no form and prime matter as traditionally conceived. So the substances of matter and spirit also do not exist.

What is needed is a completely new understanding of existence derived from the new ontological roots. Beginning from an ontology of particles in relationship, one of the key insights we derive from Divine Principle is that all existing beings we observe with some form of consciousness are compound and complex. They are not simple substance, but exist through multiple layers of relationship between discrete particles.

Invoking the principle of resemblance, then we should also fundamentally regard God too as a compound being. God is then not a simple and indivisible substance, but rather a complex being with many levels of relationship between discrete particles.

There are multiple consequences of this new understanding, but the immediate consequence of relevance here is that the objection to the Divine Feminine from the perspective of traditional ontology is removed. This is because some of those particles can be male and some female. Just as the human race contains both men and women, as "particles" within the larger whole, we can then easily imagine how both male and female combine in relationship within such a complex God. Further our personal experience of God then becomes contextual. Heavenly Parent, singular, if we are dealing with all of God, Heavenly Father if we are just dealing with the male particles and Heavenly Mother if we are dealing with the female particles. It is our own personal and direct relationship with God that is the key to how we experience God.

Finally, as food for thought, when we retire the concept of substance, we also remove the requirement that God be totally separate from us. I believe we all actively participate in God directly; that we are all a part of God. Nancy Ellen Abrams, in her book, *A God That Could be Real*, says of such a participatory experience of God:

We're truly participating in our universe when we come to feel in our bones that we are a part of the story, thoroughly integrated into the big picture. God is emerging from us and bound into us, we know where we stand in the cosmos, and we know what we are. (p. 38)

As we participate directly in God's existence we are connected beyond ourselves, not only to our fellow human beings, but intimately to the whole universe itself. We are not the separate and isolated beings we have imagined based on the Christian substantive ontology.

Dr. David Burton (UTS Class of 1990) is chemistry laboratory director and professor of chemistry at the University of Bridgeport. He holds a Ph.D. in nuclear magnetic resonance from the University of East Anglia, Norwich, England. He and his wife, Kathleen, both graduated in 1990 with an M.Div. from Unification Theological Seminary, and were subsequently campus ministers at Yale University for eight years.