

Divinity School Told to Use Gender-Neutral Terms for God

The use of gender-neutral language for references to God is being promoted at two of America's top divinity schools.

Students at the divinity school of Duke University have been given "inclusive language" guidelines which advise the use of "God" and "Godself" instead of he and him.

Duke Divinity School's guidelines state that "the exclusive use of either masculine or feminine pronouns for God should be avoided."

'Father' and 'Woman'

The guidelines claim to serve "as a beginning point for developing a more inclusive language about God."

Professors are also encouraged to use gender-neutral metaphors to refer to God. For example, they could say: "God is the father who welcomes his son, but she is also the woman searching for the lost coin."

"Imagination, patience and diligence are required in order to use language that expands and enriches our understanding of God," the guidelines suggest.

The document went on to state that: "The use of exclusively gendered language—that which always uses male nouns and pronouns for non-male subjects—can be harmful and exclusionary."

Opposition

At Vanderbilt University, professors in the divinity school have been urged to give "consistent attention to the use of inclusive language, especially in relation to the Divine,"

because campus policy “commits continuously and explicitly to include gender as an analyzed category and to mitigate sexism.”

A 2015 report listed both universities in the top 20 theological schools or seminaries in the U.S.

However, the use of gender-neutral language has previously been dismissed by the editorial director of the Gospel Coalition.

‘Original Father’

“If Jesus is God’s eternal son—and both Scripture (e.g. Heb. 1:2; John 1:14) and orthodox tradition declare that he is—then God is the original father” Andrew Moody said in an article published last year entitled “Does God Have Gender?”

Referencing Bible verses where God is likened to a bear with her cubs (Hos. 13:8) or a woman in labor (Is. 42:14), Moody asserts “God may well be like a mother, but he is the Father.”
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