



THE COMPLEAT LOVE OF GOD

By Jean Uayan

No, there is nothing wrong with the title. Although most dictionaries treat the words “compleat” and “complete” as variant spellings, I am intentionally using this “archaic” word as an adjective connoting “full information: having or exhibiting full knowledge of a particular field or skill.”¹ This word became popular because of a book on fishing entitled *The Compleat Angler* (1653) by Izaak Walton. I’d like to take it to describe God’s love not only as complete and perfect, but as compleat in the sense that He loves us with the heart of both a father and a mother.

Theologically and biblically speaking, the Israelites in the Old Testament were made aware of the warm reality of God as their loving Heavenly Father, as seen from the following verses:

Dt. 32: 10-11 *“In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions.”*

Ps. 68:5 *“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.”*

Mal. 2: 10 *“Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?”*

However, there is another verse in Jer. 2:27 where the Israelites are rebuked for their idolatrous tendency:

“They say to wood, ‘You are my father,’ and to stone, ‘You gave me birth.’ They have turned their backs to me and not their faces; yet when they are in trou-

ble, they say, ‘Come and save us!’”

Hence in the Old Testament period, the danger of association with fertility cults explains why the parental imagery is much less frequently used to describe God’s relationship with Israel, as compared with the covenant and kingship metaphors.

And yet when Jesus came, He highlighted not only the Father and Son relationship of the godhead, but also brought us into an even more intimate knowledge that God is truly our Father, for he said:

Jhn. 8:41 *“If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me.”*

Jhn. 8:54 *“If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me.”*

I Jhn. 3:1 *“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”*

When the Bible used parental imagery, it wasn’t only depicting God as Father, but there are passages where God’s love is described in maternal metaphors, as the following verses show.

Isa. 49:15 *“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!”*

Isa. 66:13 *“As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem.”*

These verses reveal another dimension of God’s parental love—the maternal side.

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“Compleat” is to describe God’s love not only as complete and perfect, but as compleat in the sense that He loves us with the heart of both a father and a mother.

Eduardo To
CALAPAN, ORIENTAL MINDORO

My practicum this summer started on April 8 and ended on May 8, 2005. BSOP gave me the privilege to serve our Lord at the Jesus Christ Church of Calapan located in the island of Mindoro. Upon arriving at the pier alone, a church member fetched and took me to a restaurant where we had lunch. Next, she drove me to the house church where I was going to stay throughout my practicum.

Pastor Anita Uy, an alumna of BSOP, briefed me on schedules and ministries, which included three days of visitation and three Bible studies per week. Every Friday we had our Bible study and prayer meeting together with the church leaders. Before the worship service every Sunday we had the Dawn Prayer Meeting, where we prayed for other countries and their ministry needs.

I have learned so many things during my practicum this summer. First, how to manage my time properly. I made a whole month calendar where I wrote down my schedules and my lessons. Secondly, I also experienced what it meant to be away from my family for a long time. Thirdly, I learned how to develop and increase my faith in God. There was nothing much I could do except to read books which I brought with me, to meditate on God's word, and prepare my lessons. These activities helped me to grow spiritually.

The most exciting part of my practicum was my visit to the Mangyan Bible School, located at the foot of the mountain in Mindoro. It opened my mind to God's magnificent work in reaching out to those poor people in isolated places. I was so happy to see 400 youths belonging to different tribes joining the youth conference. Some even traveled by foot for many miles through the mountain just to get there. It is clear that God is using different organizations and people to support this Bible School. I told the Mangyans that I praised God that I met them; I now have a story to tell my co-workers back in Manila about the goodness of the Lord to their community.

I felt joy and sorrow when it was time for me to leave Calapan City after a full month of ministry. Joy because I would soon see my wonderful family again back in BSOP; and sorrow because it was time for me to leave my new family in Calapan City. I am praying and hoping that I will meet them again in the future.

STUDENTS' SUMMER PRACTICUM

Jeanne Caramoan
CEBU CITY

I was assigned to have my practicum in Cebu Gospel Church during the last part of April to May. It was my first time to leave Manila and travel alone to a province which was foreign to me. And I felt a little bit anxious. The plane that I took almost had an accident. It suddenly climbed back into the air after its first attempted landing. Thank God, after fervent prayer, the second attempt became a success. I went to join the church's Youth Summer Camp in Mandaue City for one week as a counselor and a camp medic. My inability to speak the Visayan dialect didn't hinder me to share the word of God to the young people. Not only did I get to share His word, I was fed, too. During that camp, God made me see the significance of counseling the youth.

The week following was the Vacation Bible School. I was asked to teach children from grades 1-2. I told Bible stories to 32 students for one week. I also came to know them by playing badminton and helping them do their crafts. Getting tired never bothered me because I always thought of the joy of serving our loving God. Just as Jesus joyfully welcomed the little children in His kingdom (Matt. 10:14), I also learned from Christ to be patient, to understand and love them as Christ has loved me.

Two weeks later the church held a Sunday School teachers training. I shared to the teachers and leaders of their youth the methods of leading a Bible study. I also imparted some knowledge on how to counsel children and adults. The rest of our time was spent in sharing our testimonies and God's word in different fellowships. Praise God for these wonderful experiences!



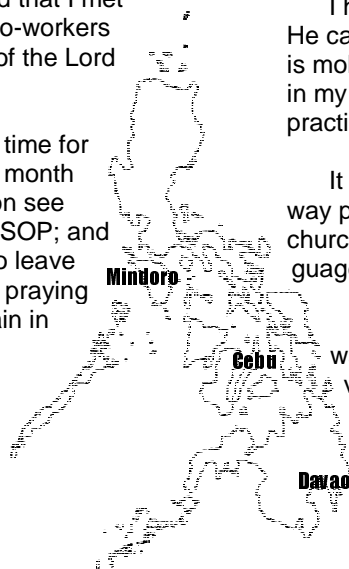
Allan Rillera
DAVAO CITY

I have been so grateful to God ever since the time He called me out of this dark world and until now that He is molding me. I can see how the Lord has been moving in my life. He really puts everything in order, even my practicum.

It is a joy for me to have summer practicum in faraway places, for it is a chance to be exposed to different churches, local cultures, tradition, lifestyle, and languages.

I was assigned to Davao Evangelical Church. I was quite surprised because last year, a pastor invited me to have my next summer practicum in Davao (but in another church) and I never expected to be assigned to DEC. I was quite tense for I heard that many great preachers come from DEC, so I really made more preparations.

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FACULTY ON THE MOVE

- ☞ Dr. Joseph Shao spoke during a summer conference held in L.A. last May 27-30, 2005, on the topic “The Old Testament Message and Today’s Christians.” He also led a workshop on “How to Develop and Nurture God’s Worker” on July 1-4, 2005. The venue was at the Chinese Alliance Church General Assembly in Canada.
- ☞ Last May 2005, Dr. Tan Chiu Eng attended the Consultation on Academic and Curriculum conducted by the Asia Theological Association in Thailand.
- ☞ Prof. Allen Lim represented the Seminary to attend the Second Chinese Congress on Theological Education held in Taipei last June 16-19, 2005.

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Before going to Davao, I already felt the support of some of my soon-to-be co-workers. While in Davao the brothers and sisters really supported me in so many ways.

This practicum exposed me to different kinds of ministries: as a counselor in the College and Junior conferences, leading Bible studies in Young Pro and Men’s Fellowship; leading in Christian Youth and Junior Youth Fellowships, preaching during Youth worship, doing visitations, and missions work.

I have learned to train and expose the young people to do God’s work; to have heartfelt dedication in reaching out to the people, whether young or old, and to be responsible for doing the task entrusted by God, and willing to administer the church.

I also learned to set aside personal matters, to focus on doing ministry and to be prepared at all times. Another lesson is not to neglect our relationship with others which is important in ministry. I was so busy preparing my message that I sometimes forgot to mingle with others.

In Davao I found more time with God; He taught me many things as I read and meditated on His word day and night. I praise him that I can find rest in him especially during difficult times.

Praise God for leading me! To God be the glory!

VISITING PROFESSORS

The Seminary gratefully acknowledges this quarter’s visiting professors: Tu Wei Ke and Ding Shi Ren who respectively taught Mission modules from June 13-24 and June 27-July7, 2005, and Luo Hui Min who taught Old Testament I from June 13 to July 1, 2005.

ATA TEAM VISITS

A Visiting Evaluation Team (VET) from the Asia Theological Association, composed of Dr. John Narendra, Dr. Theresa Lua, and Dr. Floyd Cunningham, visited the Seminary last July 7-9, 2005. After meeting all the students and personnel, the team gave BSOP a positive evaluation.

IN MEMORIAM

The father of our staff member Mrs. Ruth Yam passed away last July 9, 2005. Mr. Ngo Suan Ping was eighty-five years old. The Seminary conducted a memorial service at Arlington Memorial last July 11, 2005.

We are fully aware that the love of a father and that of a mother have different expressions or dimensions. Although rare in the Old Testament, the above major passages clearly provide the two dimensions of God's parental love. When we turn to the New Testament, Jesus displayed the maternal aspect of God's love through the following verse:

Mat. 23:37 "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.*"

Jesus had canonical precedents for this imagery. For instance, in the book of Ruth, when Boaz praised Ruth for her care of Naomi, he said, "*May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.*" (Ruth 2:12 NIV) Another verse is Psa. 91:4, "*He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.*"

This mother hen imagery might also be tapping into a passage in the apocryphal book of II Esdras 1: 27-30a (NRSV): "*It is not as though you have forsaken me; you have forsaken yourselves, says the Lord. Thus says the Lord Almighty, Have I not entreated you as a father entreats his sons or a mother her daughters or a nurse her children, so that you should be my people and I should be your God, and that you should be my children and I should be your father? I gathered you as a hen gathers her chick under her wings.*"

Such imagery depicts that God's love is so sheltering, unconditional and long-suffering, that we need fear only if we reject it and respond with poor substitutes as the Israelites did with their ritual offerings.

Was the parental imagery also de-emphasized by the early church in its understanding of the Old or New Testaments? Actually, there is strong evidence that prior to A.D. 400,² the church, especially of the Syriac tradition, used such imagery quite extensively. Two samples from the Odes of Solomon and from the Hymns of Ephrem Syrus will show quite well how the Church of the East incorporated this imagery into their worship and belief system. It must be pointed out that these two sources are orthodox, not Gnostic or pagan, according to the evaluation of modern scholars.

Ode 19 imaged the Holy Spirit as well as the Father as feminine. The passage reads:

A cup of milk was offered to me, and I drank it with the sweetness of the Lord's kindness.

The Son is the cup, and the Father is He who was milked; and the Holy Spirit is She who milked Him.

Because His breasts were full, and it was undesirable that His milk should be ineffectually released.

The Holy Spirit opened her bosom [other translations, "womb"], and mixed the milk of the two breasts of the Father.

Then She gave the mixture to the generation without their knowing, and those who received it are in the perfection of the right hand.

Here the cup refers to the Son, the Spirit is both the One who "milked" him, ie., took God's grace and bestowed it on the world, and who opened the womb, the place in which His activity is conceived. Hans Drijvers has traced the image of God's womb in this Ode back to the earliest Syriac version of John 1:18, which reads, 'the only-begotten Son, which is from the womb of the Father,' a wording kept in the Peshitta version.³ In the NIV and other English versions, the word has been rendered as "bosom" or "side," with the phrase given as "who is at the Father's side" or "who is in the bosom of the Father."

According to an authority on Syriac Christianity, Susan Ashbrook Harvey, for the Odist, the perfection of the body reflects and reveals the perfection of the believer and the body becomes truly the image of its Creator. The goodness of God's creation (physical/spiritual, visible/invisible, body/soul) is affirmed and celebrated and justly understood to provide images by which to ponder the mystery of God's salvific work. This is the context by which the use of gender imagery should be understood appropriately. Gender imagery declares that the whole of the human person is created in God's image; that gender, like any other part of human identity, barely reflects what Harvey calls a "reality that contains all things, transcends all things, and is greater than any language can convey . . . it bears witness to the notion that gender – but not one gender only – is somehow fundamental to both human and divine identity, albeit in ways that do not fit the human social conception (or construction) thereof."⁴

To be continued.

¹ Encarta® World English Dictionary, North American Edition.

² During the fifth century, Rabbula (d. 435) became the bishop of Edessa, one of the bases of Syrian Christianity. He brought the Church of Edessa into conformity with the Western Church (including Scripture, theological position, political affiliation and liturgical language), thus its theology became derivative from Greek theology. This shift was also in reaction to the growing concern of the influence of and confusion caused by Gnostic texts and theology, traces of which are found in Bardaisan's works. {See discussion in Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, *Christian in Asia Before 1500*. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 43-45.} Gradually, the use of female imagery diminished in the whole Syrian Church; it is now retained mostly in the liturgical language of the Church.

³ Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Feminine Imagery for the Divine: The Holy Spirit, the Odes of Solomon and Early Syriac Tradition," in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37, no. 2-3 (1993): 126. She was referring to H.J.W. Drijvers' article "The 19th Ode of Solomon," in *Journal of Theological Studies* 31 (1980), 337-355. The NIV translates as "at the Father's side" while the RSV, NASB and KJV translate as "in the bosom of the Father." [article-on-line]; available from http://66.77.30.29/pls/eli/eli_bg_superframe?PID=n0036-3227_037_0203_0107&artid=ATLA000868606; Internet; accessed 20 July 2003.