

SPEAKING THE UNSPEAKABLE:
NEARLY 1,500 YEARS OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY
AND WORSHIP

By Tim Bulkeley

In the first of these five lectures, we stressed one of the basic but too often forgotten or ignored postulates of Christian theology—that God is alone and only, not a member with others of any class or group of beings. In Latin, God is *sui generis* or of his own kind. In terms of gender and sexuality, if God were either really "he" or "she" or "he and she," such a god would merely be part of this larger group of sexual or gendered beings. Although people may choose to imagine God as "he," God is beyond he-ness and she-ness, just as God is beyond every other category we can imagine.

We also talked about how this "being beyond" means that to speak of God using everyday language, we need to use pictures, otherwise we cannot approach speaking positively about God. The other way is the negative route—i.e., to talk about what God is not. God is not limited or God is not part of some group of beings. However, circling around God by saying what God is not leaves a sort of hole in the middle, which may satisfy philosophers and some systematic theologians but is not appropriate language for worship or preaching. For worship and preaching, we must use picture language. However, pictures are both powerful and dangerous.

In the second lecture, we explored some of the ways in which the Bible uses motherly language and pictures to describe God. Then in the third lecture, we moved on to consider how Jesus talked about God the Father and how that relates to the possibility of talking about God as motherly. It is quite striking that, in the New Testament, "Father" is used as a name for God with increasing frequency by the early Christians, so that it becomes one of their (and therefore our) favorite names for God. We also addressed the question of whether the fact that Jesus was male means that God is, in any sense, male.