

# She Who is

Elizabeth A. Johnson



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- Born December 6, 1941
- Member of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph (CSJ)
- BA Brentwood College 1964
- MA Manhattan College 1964
- Ph. D Catholic University of America (CUA) 1981



After receiving a PhD in theology from Catholic University of America (1981), she taught at that university for ten years before moving to Fordham University. Professor, mentor, writer, editor, and public lecturer at home and abroad, she is a former president of the Catholic Theological Society of America, the oldest and largest society of theologians in the world, and a former president of the American Theological Society, an ecumenical association. She loves to teach and was awarded Fordham University's Teaching Award in 1998 and Professor of the Year Award in 2011 (most fond of these).

Dr. Johnson has received fifteen honorary doctorates, the John Courtney Murray Award for distinguished achievement in theology, and numerous other accolades. Her book *She Who Is* garnered several honors, most notably the Grawemeyer Award in Religion. Her work has been translated into thirteen languages, including German, Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch, Polish, Icelandic, Lithuanian, Bosnian, Korean, Indonesian, and Thai. She serves on the editorial boards of the journals *Theological Studies*, *Horizons: Journal of the College Theology Society*, and *Theoforum*. She appears with photo and brief biography in the Library

of Congress 2009 Engagement Calendar, entitled Women Who Dare, for the week of June 22-28, 2009.

Deeply involved in the life of the church, her public service has included being a theologian on the national Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue (1984-91); a consultant to the US Catholic Bishops' Committee on Women in Church and Society; a theologian on the Vatican-sponsored dialogue between science and religion, and on the Vatican-sponsored ecumenical conference on Christ and world religions; and a core committee member of the Common Ground Initiative, started by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin (Chicago) to reconcile polarized groups in the Catholic Church. (from <https://www.fordham.edu/academics/departments/theology/faculty/elizabeth-a-johnson/>)

The **Sisters of St. Joseph**, also known as the **Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph**, abbreviated **CSJ** or **SSJ**, is a [Roman Catholic religious congregation](#) of women founded in [Le Puy-en-Velay, France](#), in 1650. This congregation, named for [Saint Joseph](#), has approximately 14,000 members worldwide: about 7,000 in the United States; 2,000 in France; and are active in 50 other countries. (From [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sisters\\_of\\_St.\\_Joseph](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sisters_of_St._Joseph))

# Symbol

"Since our mind is not proportionate to the divine substance, that which is the substance of God remains beyond our intellect and so is unknown to us. Hence the supreme knowledge which we have of God is to know that we do not know God, insofar as we know that what God is surpasses all that we can understand of him [the "him," so easily assumed, being the problem that this book is addressing]" Aquinas



P 45 (46)

# Symbol

ground of being (Paul Tillich)

matrix surrounding and sustaining all life (Rosemary Ruether)

power of the future (Wolfhart Pannenberg)

holy mystery (Karl Rahner)

all point to divine reality that cannot be captured in concepts or images.

What are symbols we use for God?



P 45 (46)

“Marcia Falk notes, “Dead metaphors make strong idols,” (p45 (46))

# Traits

“The feminine is there for the enhancement of the male, but not vice-versa: there is no mutual gain.” (p 49 (50))

Feminine Traits:

“the Bible allows us to speak of maternal traits in God (Visser't Hooft);

to transform our over-masculinized culture, we need to relate to the feminine traits of God (O'Hanlon);

although we have forgotten this, the God of revelation has feminine traits such as tenderness (Congar);

God is not simply male but has maternal traits (Kung)

What are feminine traits you have used to describe God or have heard used to describe God?

# Lost Things

Luke 15:4-10

Lost sheep

Lost coin



# Images of God

male

female

without gender (friend, redeemer)

non personal terms

Biblical names (abba, Servant, Paraclete)

retrieving the nonpatriarchal meaning of Father of Jesus Christ ← What is this???

What are your images of God?

P 194 (204)



# Three what?

persons

essences

somewhats

What do you feel is best?



The word first came into trinitarian language as the Greek hypostasis, a philosophical term that is virtually untranslatable into modern English. (p203 (213-214))

# Bad math...

$$1 = 3$$

$$3 = 1$$

The 3 persons of the Trinity do not make more God than just one person of the Trinity.

“in that highest trinity one is as much as the three together, nor are two anything more than one. And they are infinite in themselves. So both each are in each, and all in each, and each in all, and all in all, and all are one.” Augustine



# Ideal humanity

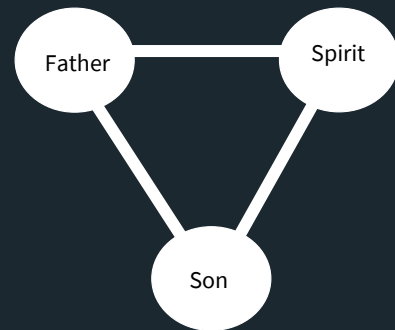
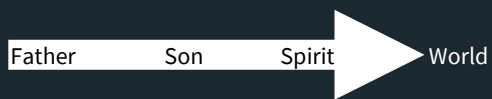
"The true God exists as a mystery of communion of Father, Son, and Spirit. The diversity of the persons does not break up divine unity but reveals its profound richness, which is greater thanks to the distinction of the persons than it would be with a single subject alone. Accordingly, the triune God whom we encounter in history as the origin, mediator, and driving force of liberation dwells as a community of love wherein there is total equality amid mutuality and respect for difference. The triune symbol thus understood is a model of the highest ideal for humanity. It lays the foundation for a liberated society of equal brothers and sisters, critiques patterns of unjust domination, and offers a source of inspiration for change" (p208 (219))



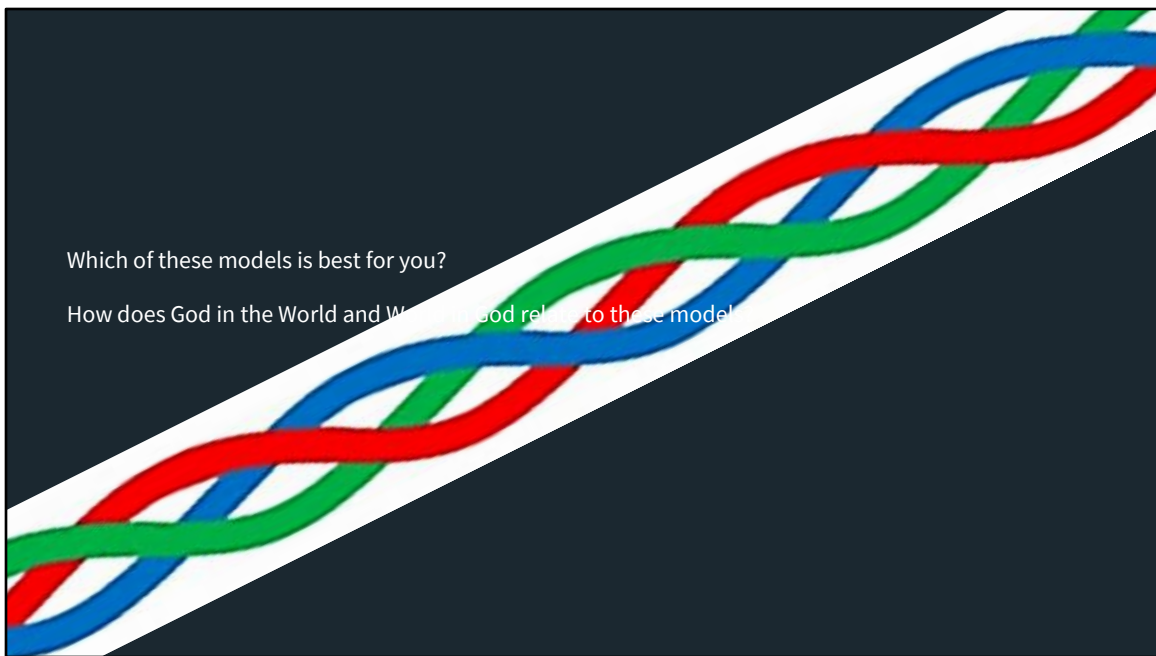
# Classical Trinitarian Theology

Eastern

Western



P 221 (233)



P 221 (233)

"This book's choice to use mainly female symbolism for God, let me state clearly, is not intended as a strategy of subtraction, still less of reversal. Rather, it is an investigation of a suppressed world directed ultimately toward the design of a new whole. Shaping this kind of speech is not an end in itself but must be received as an essential element in reordering an unjust and deficiently religious situation. Until a strong measure of undervalued female symbolism is introduced and used with ease, equivalent imaging of God male and female, which I myself have advocated and still hold to be a goal, remains an abstraction, expressive of an ideal but unrealizable in actual life."

What can we do to make this actual life?

P 57 (58)

In the light of the gospel, by what right are compassionate love, reverence, and nurturing predicated as primordially feminine characteristics, rather than human ones?

Why are strength, sovereignty, and rationality exclusively masculine properties?

In what ways can we refer to God that do not imply a gender?



**Jesus had 12 men too**