

Christian eschatology has refused to accept the inevitable limitations of earthly existence.⁶⁶

The consequences of a distorted relationship to the earth have had a disproportionate effect on poor women, men and children.⁶⁷ Indeed, a critique of the devastating repercussions of unequal power relations is at the core of feminist theology and spirituality, as women envision and live into new forms of relationship. Here, the boundaries between systematic theology and ethics begin to dissolve, as the concern for justice and right relation extends into every dimension of life.

Loyola University, Chicago

SUSAN A. ROSS

KEY RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS: CHRIST AND GOD

At the center of debates about whether Christian feminist theology is possible are the religious symbols of Christ, the cross, and the Trinity. Focusing on critical questions under dispute in the fields of Christology and soteriology and the theology of God, the following section will highlight recent contributions to constructive theology in those areas.

Christology and Soteriology

Over 20 years ago Mary Daly dismissed Christian fixation on the person of Jesus as “pure idolatry,” and the Christian myths of sin and salvation as “products of supermale arrogance” serving to legitimate the oppression of women through blaming a woman for humankind’s destruction and exalting the violent death of a unique male savior.¹ To date, both post-Christian feminists and Vatican documents continue to emphasize the theological and symbolic significance of the maleness of Jesus. The former argue that Christianity is by its very nature “hopelessly patriarchal” and “harmful to the cause of human equality,”² while the latter insist that the Incarnation of the Word according to the male sex is “in harmony with the entirety of God’s plan,” and that if the role of the presider at the Eucharist were not taken by a man, “it would be difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ. For Christ himself was and remains a man.”³

Rejecting both of those positions, most revisionist Christian feminist theologians maintain that the maleness of Jesus has no theological

⁶⁶ *Sexism and God-Talk* 257.

⁶⁷ See Shamara Shantu Riley, “Ecology Is a Sistah’s Issue Too: The Politics of Emergent Afrocentric Ecowomanism,” in *Ecofeminism and the Sacred* 191–204.

¹ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon, 1973) 71–73.

² Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) 53, 76. See also Naomi Goldenberg, *The Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (Boston: Beacon, 1979) 4.

³ *Inter insigniores*, in *Origins* 6 (3 February 1977) 522.

significance.⁴ While Jesus' male sex was as intrinsic to his historical particularity as were his Jewish race and religion, his Galilean village roots, his class, and his ethnic heritage, it reveals nothing about the nature or gender of God, nor about the appropriateness or necessity of male images or language for the divine. Neither does the maleness of Jesus establish any "essential distinctions" between the sexes in terms of status, vocation, ability to image God or Christ, or appropriate ministerial roles.⁵ Feminist theologians point to the early Christian axiom "What is not assumed is not redeemed, but what is assumed is saved by union with God" to establish that what was at stake in the doctrinal disputes of the early Church was the full humanity, not the maleness, of Jesus.

As liberation theologians, feminists stress that it is not the sex or gender of Jesus that is significant, but rather his praxis and his preaching of the *basileia* vision of God's all-inclusive love. Rosemary Radford Ruether turns to the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels to ground her approach to Jesus as prophetic liberator, the representative of liberated humanity and the liberating Word of God.⁶ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza emphasizes the egalitarian renewal movement that grew up around Sophia's prophet, Jesus.⁷ Elizabeth Johnson retells the story of Jesus as prophet and child of Sophia who proves to be Sophia incarnate.⁸ Stress on the liberating praxis of Jesus and his solidarity with the poor and marginalized, rather than his maleness, as revelatory of the divine mystery is to be found not only in the writings of North

⁴ This approach is criticized even within feminist circles, however, for producing a Christology that is either androgynous or docetic, failing to deal adequately with embodiment, dismissing particularity, and failing to critique the Western sex/gender frame of meaning. See Mary Aquin O'Neill, "The Mystery of Being Human Together," in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993) 139–60; Eleanor McLaughlin, "Feminist Christologies: Re-Dressing the Tradition," in *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol: Essays in Feminist Christology*, ed. Maryanne Stevens (New York: Paulist, 1993) 118–49; and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet* (New York: Continuum, 1994) chap. 2.

⁵ On the contrary, feminists argue that the maleness of Jesus can be seen as an aspect of the "kenosis of patriarchy." See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston: Beacon, 1983) 137.

⁶ *Sexism and God-Talk* 134–38; and "Can Christology Be Liberated from Patriarchy?" in *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol* 7–29, at 23–24. For emphasis on Jesus as prophet within a prophetic movement, see Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Re-membering Jesus: Women, Prophecy, and Resistance in the Memory of the Early Churches," *Horizons* 19 (1992) 199–218.

⁷ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) and *Jesus: Miriam's Child*.

⁸ "Redeeming the Name of Christ," in *Freeing Theology* 115–37; *SHE WHO IS: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 94–100, 150–69; "Jesus, the Wisdom of God: The Biblical Basis for a Non-Androcentric Christology," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 61 (1985) 261–94; and "Wisdom Was Made Flesh and Pitched Her Tent Among Us," in *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol* 95–117.

American and European white feminists but also in Jacquelyn Grant's womanist Christology,⁹ in Nelly Ritchie's reading of the Gospels from the perspective of Latin American women and María Pilar Aquino's synthesis of feminist theology from Latin America;¹⁰ in the African Christologies of Teresa M. Hinga, Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, Thérèse Souga, Louise Tappa, Elizabeth Amoah, and Mercy Amba Oduyoye;¹¹ and in Asian women's theology as represented by Chung Hyun Kyung, Lydia Lascano, Virginia Fabella and Mary John Mananzan.¹² From the context of their diverse social locations, women call attention to aspects of Jesus' particularity often overlooked in previous Christologies. Grant emphasizes Jesus' "birth among the least"; Elizabeth Amoah and Mercy Amba Oduyoye observe that he was a refugee and guest of Africa; Asian women note that he belonged to a colonized people.

Not all feminists agree, however, that Christology should focus on the liberating life and praxis of Jesus. Jewish feminist Judith Plaskow questions whether there is any way Christians can make claims about "Jesus' specialness" without rejecting or disparaging Judaism.¹³ Recognizing that dilemma, Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the norm of Christian theology is not to be derived from the "option of the historical Jesus for the poor and the outcast," but rather in wo/men's strug-

⁹ Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989) 215–18; See also Kelly Delaine Brown, "God Is as Christ Does: Toward a Womanist Theology," *Journal of Religious Thought* 46 (1989) 7–16.

¹⁰ Nelly Ritchie, "Women and Christology," in *Through Her Eyes: Women's Theology from Latin America*, ed. Elsa Tamez (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1989) 81–95; and María Pilar Aquino, *Our Cry for Life: Feminist Theology from Latin America* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993) 138–49.

¹¹ Teresa M. Hinga, "Jesus Christ and the Liberation of Women in Africa," in *The Will to Arise: Woman, Tradition and the Church in Africa*, ed. Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992) 183–94; Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, "Christology and an African Woman's Experience," in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, ed. Robert Schreiter (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991) 70–81; Thérèse Souga and Louise Tappa "The Christ-Event from the Viewpoint of African Women," in *With Passion and Compassion*, ed. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988) 22–34; and Elizabeth Amoah and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "The Christ for African Women," *ibid.* 35–46.

¹² Chung Hyun Kyung asserts that "Jesus as liberator" is the most prominent new image among Asian women from India, Indonesia, Korea, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka. See "Who is Jesus for Asian Women?" in *Struggle to Be the Sun Again* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993) 62. See also "Women and the Christ Event," in *Proceedings: Asian Women's Consultation* (Manila: EATWOT, 1985); Virginia Fabella, "A Common Methodology for Diverse Christologies" in *With Passion and Compassion* 108–21; and Mary John Mananzan, "Paschal Mystery from a Philippine Perspective," in *Concilium* 1993/2: *Any Room for Christ in Asia?* ed. Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993) 86–94.

¹³ Judith Plaskow, "Feminist Anti-Judaism and the Christian God," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7 (1991) 99–108, at 106–7. See also *idem*, "Dialogue Between Christians and Jews," *New Conversations* (Spring 1987) 20–22; and Christian Feminism and Anti-Judaism," *Cross Currents* 33 (1978) 306–9.

gle for the transformation of kyriarchy.¹⁴ She stresses that the egalitarian Jesus-movement which she reconstructed in her book *In Memory of Her* is one of several renewal movements in Second Temple Judaism, part of the various *basileia* and holiness movements that sought the liberation of Israel from Roman colonial occupation. Rita Nakashima Brock rejects the focus on Jesus as unique "hero" and shifts the emphasis of Christology towards communities that continue to "heal brokenheartedness," to struggle for justice and love, to exercise the kind of "willfulness and hope" that Jesus did.¹⁵

No symbol is more problematic for feminist theologians than the cross. Daly's early rejection of the Christian "scapegoat syndrome" that encouraged women disciples to accept the role of passive victim¹⁶ reaches a new level of urgency when considered in the context of contemporary violence against women and children. Nakashima Brock has criticized atonement theories in which "the Father allows or even inflicts the death of his only perfect son" as a form of "cosmic child abuse."¹⁷ Traditional soteriological theories of atonement and satisfaction rooted in Anselm are widely criticized, if not totally rejected, by feminists.¹⁸

There are, however, efforts to retrieve a theology of the cross and even the doctrine of atonement within feminist circles. Mary Grey proposes to reweave the metaphor of "at-one-ment" in terms of "the dynamic energy of mutuality and the making of right relation" and to

¹⁴ *Jesus: Miriam's Child* 48. For the use of the terms "kyriarchy" and "wo/men," see *ibid.* 13–14, 24. Schüssler Fiorenza insists that feminists must reject "malestream" hermeneutical frameworks rather than reinterpret the historical Jesus in liberationist terms (88).

¹⁵ *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 66–67, and "Losing Your Innocence But Not Your Hope," in *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol* 30–53, at 47–51.

¹⁶ *Beyond God the Father* 75–77.

¹⁷ *Journeys by Heart* 56. See also Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, "For God So Loved the World?" in *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (New York: Pilgrim, 1989) 1–30; and Dorothee Sölle's critique of Moltmann's "crucified God" in *Suffering*, trans. Everett Kalin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 26–28.

¹⁸ See Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Jesus and Salvation," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 49 (1994) 1–18, at 5–6, 14–15; Ellen Leonard, "Women and Christ: Toward Inclusive Christologies," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 6 (1990) 266–85, at 271, 281; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child* chap. 4.; Mary Grey, *Feminism, Redemption, and the Christian Tradition* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990) chap. 6.; Carter Heyward, "Suffering, Redemption, and Christ: Shifting the Grounds of Feminist Christology," *Christianity and Crisis* 49 (1989) 381–86; and Christine E. Gudorf, *Victimization: Examining Christian Complicity* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992). Note also Delores M. Williams' critique of theologies of redemption that emphasize Jesus as "ultimate surrogate figure" in light of African-American women's experience of surrogacy (*Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993] 161–70).

reimage the cross as “creative birth-giving.”¹⁹ Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel argues that in the context of Jesus’ life, ministry, and relationships (especially with women), the cross can be retrieved as a symbol not only of “the guillotine or the gallows” but also of “wholeness and life.”²⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza maintains, however, that these efforts as well as the attempts by Latin American, African, and especially Asian feminist theologians to critically retrieve the symbol of the cross fail to challenge the Western “malestream” frame of reference. In her judgment, a theology of the cross as self-giving love is even more detrimental than that of obedience, because it offers a psychological and religious warrant for the exploitation of women in the name of love and self-sacrifice.²¹

The difference that social location makes in feminist perspectives on the experience of suffering and the cross is noteworthy. Womanist theologian Jacquelyn Grant, noted for her critique of white feminist theology’s racism and classism, argues that Black women have experienced Jesus as the divine co-sufferer, who empowers them in situations of oppression, precisely because “Jesus’ suffering was not the suffering of a mere human, [but of] God incarnate.”²² Another womanist scholar, Shawn Copeland, asserts that the lives of Black women under chattel slavery have redeemed the symbol of the cross from Christianity’s “vulgar misuse.”²³ African women find empowerment through their identification with the Christ who has taken on their condition of weakness, misery, injustice, and oppression, and identify Jesus not only as the crucified one, but also as mother, nurturer, liberator, conqueror over evil, and healer who restores health and life to individuals and communities.²⁴ Asian women claim a salvific value in “active suffering” in solidarity with others and as a consequence of taking stands for justice and human dignity,²⁵ but they also identify with Jesus as “suffering servant” and recognize “the Christ disfigured in his passion” in women who have been dehumanized by oppressive systems.²⁶

¹⁹ *Feminism, Redemption, and the Christian Tradition* chaps. 7–8.

²⁰ Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, “Gibt es eine feministische Kreuzestheologie,” in Eveline Valtink, ed., *Das Kreuz mit dem Kreuz: Hofgeismarer Protokolle* (Hofgeismar: Evangelische Akademie, 1990) 92, as quoted by Schüssler Fiorenza in *Jesus, Miriam’s Child* 99.

²¹ *Jesus, Miriam’s Child* 102.

²² *White Woman’s Christ* 212.

²³ Shawn Copeland, “Wading Through Many Sorrows,” in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie Townes (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993) 109–29, at 124.

²⁴ See Hinga and Nasimiyu, n. 11 above.

²⁵ Fabella, “A Common Methodology for Diverse Christologies” 110–11.

²⁶ Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to Be Sun Again* 53. Note also the related discussion of Jesus as “mother,” “woman messiah,” “priest of han,” “shaman,” and “big sister” (ibid. 64–71).

Regardless of cultural context, women who write as liberation theologians insist that the cross of Jesus is the consequence of his prophetic message and liberating life. They underscore the tragedy and human evil of the cross, highlight the role of Mary Magdalene and the other women disciples who did not abandon Jesus but rather kept vigil at his execution, and stress that Jesus was not a passive victim, nor did God require the sacrificial death of his [sic] Son to atone for human sins. Rather Jesus' death was the final act of his lifelong resistance to evil, a death he approached in fidelity to his life's mission and in solidarity with all those who suffer unjustly. In that context, Johnson suggests, the cross stands in history as a "life-affirming protest against all torture and injustice, and as a pledge that the transforming power of God is with those who suffer to bring about life for others."²⁷

Like other forms of liberation theology, feminist theologies of the resurrection highlight that the crucified one was not abandoned and that evil does not have the last word. The focus of feminist scholarship is not primarily on what happened to Jesus of Nazareth, but rather on the role of Mary Magdalene and the women as primary witnesses to the resurrection, the experience of the Spirit of the risen one in the postresurrection communities, and women's experiences of crucifixion and resurrection. Rejecting the traditional "malestream" interpretation of the empty-tomb narratives associated with women as "secondary legends," Schüssler Fiorenza explores the implications of the rhetorical "open space" of the empty tomb and the "open road" pointing ahead to Galilee, both of which open possibilities to "reclaim this space of resurrection for women's meaning-making today in the face of dehumanization and oppression."²⁸

Discussion of the postresurrection presence of Christ in the community has particular significance for women in view of Vatican claims that "Christ was and remains a man." Feminist scholars assert rather that "the risen Christ is not to be identified only with "the glorified Jesus," but that "Christ is inclusively all the baptized,"²⁹ drawing on biblical metaphors such as the Pauline Body of Christ and the Johannine vine and branches, the claims of the baptismal liturgy, the tradition of Christian martyrdom that identifies the martyr as "image of Christ," and Augustine's references to the *totus Christus*.

²⁷ "Jesus and Salvation" 15. See also "Redeeming the Name of Christ," where Johnson refers to "the cross in all its dimensions, violence, suffering, and love" as "the parable that enacts Sophia-God's participation in the suffering of the world" (125).

²⁸ *Jesus, Miriam's Child* 124–25. Note the connection between the empty tomb tradition and the importance of the body in feminist writings.

²⁹ Schneiders, *Women and the Word* (New York: Paulist, 1986) 54. See also Johnson, *SHE WHO IS* 161–63, and idem, "The Maleness of Christ," in *Concilium* 1991/6: *The Special Nature of Women?* ed. Anne Carr and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991) 108–16; and David N. Power, "Representing Christ in Community and Sacrament," in *Being a Priest Today*, ed. Donald J. Goergen (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1992) 97–123, at 115–16.

Questions of Jesus' praxis and preaching and their implications for the community that claims to live in his name, rather than questions of Jesus' identity or unique status, are primary in feminist Christologies. Some focus totally or primarily on the Christian community rather than on Jesus, and view emphasis on the uniqueness or normativity of Jesus as exclusive or arrogant.³⁰ Others, like Johnson, wager that the classic doctrine of Incarnation, if retrieved in the framework of a wisdom Christology, can offer the possibility for interreligious and cosmic inclusivity rather than exclusivity, arrogance, or imperialism. Grant stresses the political implications of the claim that "Jesus is the Christ, that is, God Incarnate," reminding white feminists that "Black women's affirmation of Jesus as God meant that White people were not God."³¹ Feminists also underscore the eschatological dimension of Christology. The incomprehensible and radically free God remains ultimately a *hidden* God; therefore, the revelation of God even in Jesus of Nazareth is necessarily limited.

The Mystery of God

While classical Christian theology has always held that the incomprehensible mystery of the divine remains transcendent, utterly beyond human knowledge, concepts, images, or categories, yet in practice, piety, and the popular imagination God has been identified as male.³² The Incarnation of God in the concrete humanity of the male Jesus, Jesus' addressing God as "abba," the overwhelming use of male images and names for God in the Bible, the identification of the God of the Scriptures with the God of Greek philosophy and of Jesus with the logos, the male principle of rationality, all contributed to the perception that Christianity is intrinsically patriarchal. Furthermore, in the development of classical theism the God of Jesus became identified with the unoriginate source of all that is, the omnipotent and omni-

³⁰ See I. Carter Heyward, "An Unfinished Symphony of Liberation: The Radicalization of Christian Feminism among White U.S. Women: A Review Essay," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 1/1 (Spring 1985) 99–118, at 115; idem, "Jesus of Nazareth/Christ of Faith: Foundations of a Reactive Christology," in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, ed. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990) 191–200; Catherine Keller, "The Jesus of History and the Feminism of Theology," in *Jesus and Faith*, ed. J. Carlson and R. A. Ludwig (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1994) 71–82; and Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart* 66–70. See also the discussion in Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child* 141–47.

³¹ Grant, *White Women's Christ* 215, 213. Chung Hyun Kyung makes a similar argument regarding the liberating dimensions of the image of Jesus as "Lord" for Asian women (*Struggle to Be the Sun Again* 57–59). For other approaches to Jesus as "God-with-us/Emmanuel," see Marina Herrera, "Who Do You Say Jesus Is? Christological Reflections from a Hispanic Woman's Perspective," in *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol* 72–94, at 89; and Souga, "The Christ-Event from the Viewpoint of African Women," in *With Passion and Compassion* 28.

³² See Schneiders, *Women and the Word* 15–19.

scient ruler of all creation, who remained immutable and impassible, utterly independent and unrelated to the world.³³

No purely theoretical construct, this patriarchal doctrine of God functioned to legitimate the divinely intended hierarchical order of creation in which humans were meant to "subdue and dominate the earth"; the male was the divinely ordained head of the family, the household, Church, and society; children were subject to their parents' absolute authority; slaves, to their masters; and colonized peoples, to their rulers. Identifying the theological linchpin of the system, Ruether explains: "Religions that reinforce hierarchical stratification use the Divine as the apex of this system of privilege and control."³⁴ Beyond the ethical critique of a doctrinal system and language for God that is oppressive, unjust, and destructive of the spirituality and self-image of women and girls, feminists also charge that the identification of God as male, whether explicit or not, is ultimately idolatrous.

For some feminists the very word "God" is intrinsically tied in the human imagination to the male patriarchal God; thus the need for women to turn to the Goddess. Carol Christ explains that for some women, the Goddess is simply "female power writ large," while others see the Goddess as real divine protectress to whom they can pray; but in either case, women "need" the Goddess as affirmation of female power, the female body, the female will, and women's bonds and heritage, all of which are either denied or denigrated in patriarchal religion.³⁵ Others, while remaining profoundly critical of patriarchy, are also critical of women's turn to goddess spirituality as historically uncritical, separatist, overly idealistic regarding the goodness and harmony in creation, and reinforcing a dual anthropology and the dualism between nature and civilization.³⁶

Feminists have adopted various strategies to subvert patriarchal ways of imaging and speaking about the divine mystery. Ruether initiated the use of the term "God/ess," intended for theological but not liturgical use, to point toward "that yet unnameable understanding of the divine that would transcend patriarchal limitations and signal

³³ For a critical, but nuanced, feminist analysis of Aquinas on God's relation to the world, see *SHE WHO IS* 224–27.

³⁴ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* 61; see Daly, *Beyond God the Father* 13.

³⁵ Carol P. Christ, "Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Political Reflections," in *Womanspirit Rising*, ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979) 273–87. See also Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Spirituality, Christian Identity, and Catholic Vision," in *ibid.* 136–48. For an overview of diverse forms of goddess spirituality, see Sandra M. Schneiders, *Beyond Patching: Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist, 1991) 82–87.

³⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Goddesses and Witches: Liberation and Countercultural Feminism," *The Christian Century* 97 (10–17 September 1980) 842–47. For a helpful survey of feminist discussion about the goddess, see Mary Jo Weaver, "Who is the Goddess and Where Does She Get Us?" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5/1 (1989) 49–64.

redemptive experience for women as well as men."³⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza has recently turned to the symbol "G*d" to "visibly destabilize" our way of thinking and speaking about the divine.³⁸ McFague, Johnson, and others retain the term "God" but give it new meaning through its association with female metaphors, values, and pronouns.³⁹

Critics of feminist theology often charge that appropriate naming of God comes not from women's experiences but from God's definitive revelation in Jesus. Those who consider female names and images for the divine to be inappropriate, if not blasphemous or heretical, claim that not only the Incarnation of God in the male human being, the Son who is the perfect image of the "Father," but also Jesus's use of the term "abba" indicate that the paternal metaphor is normative for Christians. While feminist scholars do not deny the probability that Jesus did address God as "abba," they question the uniqueness, exclusivity, frequency, and significance of that title.⁴⁰ Most stress that the term "abba" connotes a relationship of profound intimacy between God and Jesus and that the God that Jesus revealed in his person, preaching, and ministry was not a patriarchal father, but rather subverted patriarchy.⁴¹

The historical life and ministry of Jesus and the experience of the Spirit in the life and worship of the early Christian communities constitute the basis for the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, the specifically Christian way of speaking of God. In recent years feminists have emphasized the affinities between trinitarian symbolism and feminist values of relationality, mutuality, friendship, equality, and community in diversity.⁴² In the early development of feminist theol-

³⁷ *Sexism and God-Talk* 46.

³⁸ *Jesus: Miriam's Child* 191, n. 3.

³⁹ See *SHE WHO IS* 42–44, and Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987). On this question, note also Rebecca Chopp's use of the term "Word" in *The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, God* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

⁴⁰ Johnson, *SHE WHO IS* 79–82. Schüssler Fiorenza notes that *basileia tou theou* was Jesus' characteristic term for the divine (*In Memory of Her* 118–30); see also Schneiders, *Women and the Word* 37–49.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 49. See also Anne E. Carr, *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988) 146–47; Bernard Cooke, "Non-Patriarchal Salvation," *Horizons* 10 (1983) 22–31; Mary Collins, "Naming God in Public Prayer," *Worship* 59 (1985) 291–304. For a critique of this position from the perspective of the Roman imperial context, see Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Abba and 'Father': Imperial Theology and the Jesus Tradition," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992) 611–30.

⁴² See Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991); *idem*, "God in Communion with Us," in *Freeing Theology* 83–114; Johnson, *SHE WHO IS* 191–223; Maria Clara Bingemer, "Reflections on the Trinity," in *Through Her Eyes* 56–80; Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Faith, Feminism and the Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 121–37; Carr, *Transforming Grace* 156–57; Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, "The Diversity of God," *The Drew Gateway* 59/2 (Spring 1990) 59–70; and Geoffrey R. Lilburne, "Christology: In Dialogue with Feminism,"

ogy, however, the doctrine of the Trinity was either ignored or explicitly rejected as an abstract, authoritative, conceptual construct, totally divorced from human experience, that functioned to legitimate patriarchal subordination through male imagery and a divine hierarchical pattern of relationships.

Catherine LaCugna argues that a theology of complementarity that grounds hierarchical and patriarchal structures of familial, ecclesial, and social relationships in a corresponding hierarchical order among the persons of the Trinity and stresses the obedience, receptivity, and submission of the Son to the Father is a violation of an orthodox theology of Trinity. Noting that any form of subordination among the persons of the Trinity is precisely what orthodox trinitarian theology precludes, she further observes that "there is no intrinsic reason why men should be correlated with God the Father and women with God the Son."⁴³

While feminists consistently denounce the stranglehold that male images and language for God have on the imagination and affirm the analogical nature of all speech about God, the question of how to name the trinitarian God, especially in the liturgical context,⁴⁴ remains disputed. Jesus' address of God as "abba," the classic form of the Christian doxology and baptismal formula, the preponderance of male images and names for the divine in the Scriptures, and Christian tradition and art all conspire to support the claim of post-Christian feminists that Christianity is a religion of fathers and sons. On this point Catholic feminists turn to Thomas Aquinas, with his reminder that all speech about God is analogical, as an ally. Others affirm the same point in the language of metaphor. The fundamental problem, Christian feminists argue, is that the paternal metaphor for God has been literalized, given ontological significance, used exclusively, and thus functions to legitimate patriarchy. Neither the Scriptures nor Christian tradition support the claim that the triune God should be addressed solely as Father, Son, and Spirit. Feminist scholars point to the plethora of images for the divine that have flourished at points in the tradition

Horizons 11 (1984) 7–27, at 18–27. See also McFague's *Models of God*, although her metaphorical approach to God as "mother, lover, and friend" is not explicitly trinitarian.

⁴³ "God in Communion with Us" 98.

⁴⁴ See Collins, "Naming God in Public Prayer" 291–304; idem, "Inclusive Language: A Cultural and Theological Question," in *Worship: Renewal to Practice* (Washington: Pastoral, 1987) 197–214; Catherine M. LaCugna, "The Baptismal Formula, Feminist Objections, and Trinitarian Theology," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26 (1989) 235–50; Gail Ramshaw "De Divinis Nominibus: The Gender of God," *Worship* 56 (1982) 117–31; idem, "Naming the Trinity: Orthodoxy and Inclusivity," *Worship* 60 (1986) 491–98; Ruth Duck, *Gender and the Name of God: The Trinitarian Baptismal Formula* (New York: Pilgrim, 1991); and Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Beyond Father and Son," in *Justice as Mission: An Agenda for the Church*, ed. C. Lind and T. Brown (Burlington, Ont.: Trinity, 1985) 107–18.

when the incomprehensibility of God was most highly prized. Although rarely retrieved until recently, there are precedents within the tradition for female images for each person of the Trinity as well as for trinitarian relations.⁴⁵

Granting that male images and titles for the divine are also appropriate, Johnson argues that at this point in the history of the Christian tradition, naming and imaging the trinitarian God in terms drawn from women's experience is existentially and religiously necessary "if speech about God is to shake off the shackles of idolatry and be a blessing for women."⁴⁶ Hence Johnson proposes that using the resources of the classic Christian tradition, we can name the persons of the Trinity Spirit-Sophia, Jesus-Sophia, and Mother-Sophia. Further she suggests that the trinitarian relations can be considered as analogous to the relationships of friend,⁴⁷ sister, mother, and grandmother. Through a feminist gloss on Aquinas's "Qui est," she names God as "SHE WHO IS," a metaphor intended to disclose the mystery of God as "sheer, exuberant, relational aliveness in the midst of the history of suffering, inexhaustible source of new being in situations of death and destruction, ground of hope for the whole created universe, to practical and critical effect."⁴⁸

While Johnson and others have criticized the writings of theologians who have attempted to address the problem of patriarchal God-language through naming the Spirit as feminine,⁴⁹ nevertheless, the role of the Spirit as present and active in the world is a primary focus in Johnson's volume and is developed with a more explicitly ecological agenda in her *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit*.⁵⁰ The Spirit is also the primary focus of writings on God from feminist theologians in Asia and Latin America who explicitly identify experiences of suffering as the starting point for their reflection on God.⁵¹ In a related, but dis-

⁴⁵ See Elizabeth A. Johnson, "The Incomprehensibility of God and the Image of God Male and Female," *TS* 45 (1984) 441–65; and LaCugna, "The Baptismal Formula" 245–47.

⁴⁶ *SHE WHO IS* 243.

⁴⁷ See also McFague, *Models of God* 157–80; Schüssler Fiorenza, "Why Not a Category of Friend/Friendship?" *Horizons* 2 (1975) 117–18; and Carr, *Transforming Grace* 213–14.

⁴⁸ *SHE WHO IS* 243.

⁴⁹ "The Incomprehensibility of God" 457–60.

⁵⁰ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit* (New York: Paulist, 1993). See also McFague's metaphorical approach to the world as God's body and God as "spirit of the body" in *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 135.

⁵¹ See Consuelo del Prado, "I Sense God in Another Way," *Through Her Eyes* 140–49; Maria Clara Luchetti Bingemer, "The Difference in the Way of Knowing and Speaking about God," in *SEDOS Bulletin* 24/6 and 7 (1992) 210–17; Marianne Katoppo, "The Concept of God and the Spirit from the Feminist Perspective," in *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, ed. Ursula King (Marknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1994) 244–50; Alida Verhoeven, "The Concept of God: A Feminine Perspective," in *Through Her Eyes*

tinct, vein, womanist theologian Delores Williams interprets God's activity in relation to the oppressed in history in terms of survival strategies rather than liberation.⁵²

The suffering and oppression that form the context for women's theological reflection on the mystery of God include not only human experience, but the devastation of the earth. Rosemary Ruether's *Gaia and God* and Sallie McFague's *Models of God* and *The Body of God* move beyond the anthropocentric focus of much of the literature on God's relation to suffering and resituate the question of God's relation to the world in its cosmological context. A consistent theme echoed in feminist writings from a variety of social contexts is the need to rethink questions of God's relation to the world and the related attributes of omnipotence, immutability, and impassibility.⁵³ If any single claim can be made about Christian feminist convictions about the mystery of God, it is that God is profoundly related to the world, indeed is the mysterious source of energy, hope, and compassion at the heart of reality.

Aquinas Institute of Theology
St. Louis

MARY CATHERINE HILKERT, O.P.

49–55; Kwok Pui-lan, "God Weeps with Our Pain," *East Asia Journal of Theology* 2 (1984) 228–32; Chung Hyun Kyung, "Come, Holy Spirit—Break Down the Walls with Wisdom and Compassion," in *Feminist Theology from the Third World* 392–94. Note also the description of God as "strength for the *lucha* [struggle]" in *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church*, ed. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Yolanda Tarango (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988) 16.

⁵² *Sisters in the Wilderness* 178–203. See also Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, *Sex, Race, and God: Christian Feminism in Black and White* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

⁵³ See Carr, *Transforming Grace* 144–57; Johnson, *SHE WHO IS* 224–72; Sheila Greeve Davaney, "God, Power and the Struggle for Liberation: A Feminist Contribution," in *Charles Hartshorne's Concept of God: Philosophical and Theological Responses*, ed. S. Sia (Boston: Kluwer Academic, 1990) 57–75; Isabel Carter Heyward, *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982); idem, "The Power of God-with-Us," *Christian Century* 107 (1990) 275–78; Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1982) 79–89; Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, " 'I Am Become Death': God in the Nuclear Age," in *Lift Every Voice* 95–107, at 106–07; and Grey, *Feminism, Redemption and the Christian Tradition* 105–35.