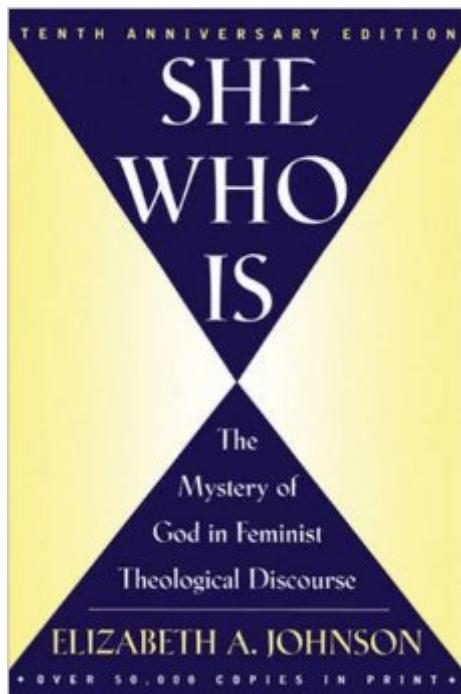


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# She Who Is: The Mystery Of God In Feminist Theological Discourse



## Synopsis

Winner of the Louisville Grawemeyer Award in Religion. This classic explains what feminist theology is and how can we rediscover the feminine God within the Christian tradition. A profound vision of Christian theology, women's experience, and emancipation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Johnson makes a compelling case that much of historical Christian language, theology and praxis establishes an inherent superiority for men and an inherent inferiority for women that is simply antithetical to our universal human nature as persons created equally in the image of God. She wants to eradicate the differentiation that has long existed between the genders' respective abilities to connect with God. She suggests that our typical and careless anthropomorphism of God allows the biblical masculine language to create a false sense that God is literally male, when a true understanding of God allows God's mysterious, unknowable nature to far exceed any sense of gender (or any other tangible description that we might use). Instead, she suggests that we use both masculine and feminine language to name God, knowing full well that neither is a literal depiction of God's gender but rather a symbolic way to communicate some hints of God's true nature. There were many aspects of Johnson's book that were intriguing and challenging to me. First and foremost, I was thankful for her gracious spirit and her complete disinterest in axe-grinding. I appreciated her commitment to meaningfully engage with Scripture, especially the Gospel accounts, rather than simply avoiding all of the inconvenient passages of Scripture that did not support her position. I was grateful that she refused to abandon or completely denigrate church tradition, instead

trying to acknowledge aspects of church history that were more sympathetic to women and even trying to explain and clarify the eras and individuals throughout history who diminished the value of women.

An excellent book that one should take enough time to read slowly and thoroughly. Elizabeth Johnson starts by looking for an appropriate word in order to refer to the Divine. It is common practice to say that God is Spirit. An interesting thing about this is that the word "Spirit" has gradually shifted from being feminine in Hebrew, to neutral in greek and ultimately masculine in latin. This is not much of a surprise in a male-dominated world. In itself this does not necessarily indicate an improvement in the adequacy of our concept of God. But if we consider this particular history of the word, it may suggest that in order to improve our image of God, we need at least to integrate all three aspects: the feminine, the neutral and the masculine. This will help us take into consideration the fact that God transcends all categories. It will help us deepen our perception of God as mystery. The important for all those who try to link with the Absolute is to know that God is, more than to know exactly what she, it, or he, is. Another interesting fact that the author points out in the same perspective, is that the Spirit as such, has never been given a proper name. Spirit is considered more often than not as an impersonal power, like a blowing wind or a breath in motion. The title of the book is a clear indication that the author approaches the mystery of God from a feminine point of view. This is done in a constructive way, without being too aggressive. Even when she suggests that Christ's ability to be savior does not reside in his maleness, but in his huge and steadfast capability to love. More challenging are her comments on the suggestion made by a number of authors, that the Spirit was, at least for some time, hypostatically united to Mary.

Over the course of Christian history, women have been disenfranchised and oppressed. Patriarchal systems and androcentric mentalities have marginalized women sociologically and psychologically, even within the Christian community. Elizabeth Johnson believes this oppression stems from the language used for God. Because God is referred to exclusively and literally as a male, women have reduced roles within Christianity. Johnson seeks to use new imagery and metaphors for speech about God, in order to emancipate women from this oppression. Johnson recognizes that all language about God is inadequate, but using feminine imagery for God restores human dignity in women and men and helps with the flourishing of humanity. Structurally, Johnson achieves this goal in four parts. In Part I, Johnson provides context and background for new speech about God. Because speech about God influences identity and praxis, new language for God must be sought. A

solution to this problem can be explored using feminist theology, and Johnson provides basic feminist principles for theology. Lastly, Johnson discusses traditional approaches to speaking inclusively about God, and establishes that it is her intent to use only feminine imagery for God. Moving from the background to the foreground, Johnson builds her methodology, in Part II, by using three resources: experience, scripture, and classical theology. The experience of women is central to her theology, and while scripture is integral, Johnson seeks the reclamation of feminine imagery. Johnson also salvages certain principles in classical theology to use in her theology: the divine incomprehensibility, the need for analogy in God-speak, and the need for many names for God.

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