

Focus Questions

The Strength of Her Witness: Jesus Christ in the Global Voices of Women (Orbis, 2016)

Elizabeth A. Johnson, editor

Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Introduction"

1. In what ways are the contributors to this volume imitating the example of the Samaritan woman in John's gospel, sometimes known as Photine?
2. How do theologies articulated from the context of women's experiences complement, enrich, and/or challenge our perceptions of Christ, traditionally dominated by male voices?

Sandra Schneiders, "Encountering and Proclaiming the Risen Jesus"

1. Why for so long have male Church leaders diminished Mary Magdalene's role as the first person to encounter the risen Christ, and the first person to proclaim his resurrection to the community, in their interpretations of John's gospel? Why is it important to restore Mary Magdalene's centrality to our interpretations?
2. What is the significance of Mary Magdalene recognizing Jesus only when he calls her name?
3. Schneiders emphasizes the complex Greek grammar and differing translations to highlight that Jesus redirects Mary Magdalene to the community. What is the importance of the community?

Teresa Okure, "The Significance Today of Jesus' Commission to Mary Magdalene"

1. How does Okure use Jesus' commissioning message to Mary Magdalene about "your father and my father" to advocate for ethical behavior in the modern world? How does the African perspective on blood relations and community further enhance this call to ethics?
2. How has the statement "me mou haptou" been used against women in the history of interpretation: How does Okure reinterpret this passage in a way that honors Mary Magdalene's significant role, as well as the theological and ethical consequences of the ascension?

Joy Ann McDougall, "Rising with Mary: Re-visioning a Feminist Theology of the Cross and Resurrection"

1. Why does McDougall want to reclaim the notion of original sin for feminist theology, not as "bondage of the will" but as "bondage of the eye/I"? How does the latter better account for women's experiences of sinful patriarchal structures?
2. Drawing on Rowan Williams, McDougall suggests that Mary Magdalene is transformed by the resurrection; it is not only Jesus who has changed. She invites us to rise with Mary in the recognition and transformation of patriarchy. What might this resurrection transformation look like, in our imaginations and in practice?

Ellen Leonard, "Women and Christ: Toward Inclusive Christologies"

1. How has a theological emphasis on Christ's maleness negatively impacted female embodiment, oppression, and experiences of Church community?
2. Leonard presents five different approaches to feminist Christology. Is there one in particular that resonates for you, the reader? Why?
3. For Leonard, Christology impacts anthropology (our understanding of humanity) and ecclesiology (our understanding of the Church). How does her approach to Christ allow for more inclusive anthropologies and ecclesiologies?

Elaine Wainwright, "'But Who Do You Say That I Am?': An Australian Feminist Response"

1. Wainwright finds that “christological formulations are not universal truths of ‘once and for all’ validity but are partial truths carrying with them the historical context and ideological particularities of those who constructed them” (67). Do heterogeneous theologies emerging from different social contexts diminish the figure of Christ, or do they rather allow us to revisit his relevance in any number of times and locations?
2. Why is it important for Wainwright that the answer to “who do you say that I am?” in Matthew is answered not with titles, but with deeds? What would a deed-focused Christology look like? Would it better capture the reign of God?

Dictionary of Feminist Theologies

1. Kelly Brown Douglas, “Christ Jesus” : How do the particular life experiences of American-American women shed new light on biblical accounts of Jesus? What is unique, and what is universal, in womanist Christology?
2. Carter Heyward, “Christa” : What function does the notion of Christa, controversial among both Christian traditionalists and feminists, serve in the broader project of Christology?
3. Francine Cardman, “Christology” : How did feminist theologians of the 1980s and 1990s build upon the classical tradition and the earlier waves of feminism?

Judith Plaskow, “Feminist Anti-Judaism and the Christian God”

1. How have Christian feminists, uncomfortable with traditional Christology, turn to Jesus’ “human specialness”? How can that exacerbate Christian anti-Judaism?
2. Why does Plaskow find the claim that “Jesus was a feminist” to be problematic and potentially anti-Jewish? Could this statement be tempered with the clarification that perhaps Jesus was representative of, rather than distinct from, first century Judaism?
3. Plaskow proposes five suggestions to mitigate anti-Jewish tendencies in feminist Christology. Do the other authors in this book sufficiently espouse these proposals?

Chung Hyun Kyung, “Who Is Jesus for Asian Women?”

1. How do the unique cultural, political, and familial experiences of Asian women influence their use of traditional Christological images like “suffering servant,” “Lord,” and “Immanuel/God with us”?
2. Among the new emerging Christological images that Chung highlights in the second part of her essay, is there one that particularly resonated with, or perhaps challenged, your understanding of Jesus Christ?

Virginia Fabella, “Christology from an Asian Woman’s Perspective”

1. In her opening paragraph, Fabella states, “Asian women are beginning to articulate their own Christologies... What we say might not be anything new; what is important is now we are saying it ourselves” (120). Why is it important for those who have been traditionally voiceless in the field of theology to articulate their own understanding of Jesus?
2. There seems to be a tension between lifting up the voices of Asian women’s theology, and critiquing their widespread espousal of a view of the cross that encourages acceptance of suffering. How can feminist theologians propose a liberating Christology without abandoning the voices and practices of these women?

Teresia M. Hinga, “Jesus Christ and the Liberation of Women in Africa”

1. How does the history of imperialism and missionary Christianity complicate the “faces” of Christ encountered by Africans?
2. How do African women draw strength from the three images of Jesus mentioned by Hinga—personal savior/friend, embodiment of spirit, and prophetic critic of the status quo?

Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “Jesus Christ”

1. This essay offers an overview of many different Christologies by African women. Though they are very varied, what commonalities do they share—emphases on suffering, healing, or wholeness, perhaps?
2. Oduyoye quotes from Hinga’s essay in this volume, borrowing the paradoxical insight that the colonial imperial Jesus imposed by European missionaries is “ambiguous” as both oppressor and liberator. How does this ambiguity play out in the Christologies Oduyoye surfaces?
3. Certain elements of the Christologies surfaced by Oduyoye may strike Western Christians as strange or foreign, for example the emphasis on Christ’s blood and the possibility of demonic possession. How might these notions enrich our understanding of Jesus Christ from the perspective of African women?

Lee Miena Skye, “Australian Aboriginal Women’s Christologies”

1. How does the aboriginal Weltanschauung (worldview) and Sitz im Leben (setting in life) inform their vision of Christ as gentle and one-with-the-earth?
2. Despite the fact that Christianity came to the aboriginal people via their oppressors, they still embrace the figure of Christ. Skye suggests that the Aboriginal benevolence towards oppressors could be instructive for other post-colonial Christian contexts. Is it possible to accept this premise while still resisting oppression?
3. Why does Skye propose Aboriginal Christology as a universal resource for modern Christians? What challenges does our world face today, and how can Aboriginal theology respond to them?

Judith Vusi, “Lord of the Insignificant: A Christ for Ni-Vanuatu Women”

1. How does the Ni-Vanuatu legend of Wagerrie illuminate Christology for Vusi?
2. How do the figures of Jesus Christ and Wagerrie speak to the experience of Ni-Vanuatu women? Do these figures of exalted humility serve to oppress or to liberate the women of the Pacific?

Maria Clara Lucchetti Bingemer, “Masculinity, Femininity, and the Christ”

1. What is problematic about current Church practice, rooted in a male-focused Christology? Why does Bingemer suggest a return to Gospel stories as a possible remedy?
2. Bingemer suggests that although Jesus was a man, his personality embraced stereotypically feminine characteristics, specifically expressive emotion. Why is this important for her theology?

María Pilar Aquino, “Jesus Christ: Life and Liberation in a Discipleship of Equals”

1. Why does Pilar Aquino find God’s incarnation as poor and oppressed to be prior to and more important than Jesus’ gender?
2. How do the various Gospel accounts of Jesus’ interactions with women demonstrate the physical reality that women’s bodies belong in the reign of God?

3. How do the incarnation, resurrection, and Jesus' identification with the oppressed inform a faith that seeks justice?

Delores S. Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption"

1. How does the experience of surrogacy, whether coerced or voluntary, compromise the dignity and self-determination of black women?
2. While much sexist oppression is universal, surrogacy is a uniquely black, female reality. How does the unique surrogacy experience of black women challenge a Christology that identifies Jesus as a surrogate?
3. What resources does Williams propose for crafting a vision of redemption that could better speak to the experience of black women?

Jacquelyn Grant, "Subjectification as a Requirement for Christological Construction"

1. Grant refocuses Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" onto the you, the person or community theologizing about him. How does this move open up space for Christology done by black women?
2. How does the particular threefold oppression of black women—racism, sexism, classism—yield more universal claims about Jesus Christ?
3. How does the inclusion of journal entries, prayers, and speeches of black women of the past enrich this more academic theological essay?

Loida I. Martell-Otero, "From *Satas* to *Santas*—*Sobrajas* No More: Salvation in the Spaces of the Everyday"

1. How does the image of Jesús sato/jíbaro—Jesus as "peripherally-placed person" (238) inform Martell-Otero's evangelica vision of salvation for the marginalized?
2. Why is the Holy Spirit an integral element of salvation and Christology for evangelicas?
3. Why does the evangelica understanding of salvation, comprised of *santidad*, *sanidad*, and *liberacion*, demand justice for the marginalized?

Dorothee Soelle, "Christ the Man for Others"

1. Why is the community of believers so important for Soelle's Christology?
2. What is Christolatry, and why does Soelle think that Christology from below is a better way?
3. How does Bonhoeffer's identification of Christ as "a man for others" express Christ's full humanity and full divinity, in keeping with the formula of Chalcedon?

Kwok Pui-lan, "Engendering Christ"

1. How does the very idea of "Jesus/Christ" entail hybridity?
2. All five of the hybrid images of Christ presented here contain an element of shock or challenge (literally, "indecent" in the case of Althaus-Reid) to traditional patriarchal and colonial christology. What is the value of shock for Christology?
3. How does the plurality of ways that the Gospels and early Christians refer to Jesus open up space for new Christological images in today's post-colonial context?

M. Shawn Copeland, "Marking the Body of Jesus, the Body of Christ"

1. What is the link between the marked bodies to whom Jesus ministered in his lifetime, and the bodies of queer people today? How are they treated by "empire" — the rules and privileges

imposed in dominating, unjust societies?

2. Copeland explains that in marking the Body of Christ as “queer,” she doesn’t literally mean that Jesus Christ was a homosexual (278). What does she mean? Why must the Body of Christ entail all manner of bodily marks?

3. How does Copeland link Jesus’ body to the Eucharistic and ecclesial Bodies of Christ? How does this connection justify her claim that any exclusion within the Church invalidates our existence as the Body of Christ?

Jeannine Hill-Fletcher, “Christology Between Identity and Difference: On Behalf of a World in Need”

1. Hill-Fletcher characterizes the human condition as fundamentally relational. How does this insight affect our understanding of Jesus and his encounters?

2. How does the image of Christ as self-giving, breast-feeding mother particularly speak to our relational existence? Is this a legitimate way to think of Christ?

3. The story of the Muslim mother in Jerusalem suggests that recognizing mutual vulnerability is the first step to engagement between religions. How might activists and people of good will prioritize this kind of encounter in their work on behalf of the world in need?

Kathryn A. Kleinhans, “Christ as Bride/Groom: A Lutheran Feminist Relational Christology”

1. Why does the traditional Chalcedonian formula of Jesus as “human with us,” as opposed to “like us,” matter for Kleinhans’s relational approach to Christology?

2. How does Kleinhans appropriate Luther’s idea of Christ as the believer’s bride/groom for a feminist Christology? How does such an image resist patriarchal structures in the Church?

3. How does the possibility of same-sex marriage enhance the mutuality of the believer’s relationship with Christ the bride/groom?

Teresa Berger, “Christmas: ‘And Became Hu/Man’”

1. Why is the English translation of the Nicene Creed, “and became man,” theologically and linguistically insufficient?

2. Does the existence of large numbers of female images of Christ in the Christian tradition strike you as surprising, given current Church practice and liturgical translations that emphasize Jesus’ maleness?

3. How would it feel to recite the creed saying, “and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became Mensch.”

Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, “The Passion of the Womb: Women Re-living the Eucharist”

1. How does Gajiwala connect Jesus’ self-sacrifice with women’s experiences, including childbirth, breastfeeding, meal preparation, and persecution for pursuing social justice?

2. How does current Eucharistic practice in the Church deny women’s humanity, dignity, and relationship with God? How are feminist theologians navigating around this painful reality?

[Questions compiled with the assistance of Mary Kate Holman, PhD student, Fordham University]