We are in the midst of discussing feminist theology, and we are using as the basis for our discussion a work by Elizabeth Johnson entitled *She Who Is*, subtitled *The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. I want to continue with describing what Johnson has to say, but I’ll do that as soon as we have begun with a word of prayer.

Father, we thank you so much for the privilege of study. Lord, we thank you that you are a God who loves us, that you care about us, regardless of what our circumstances are and regardless of how we respond to you. But, Lord, we do want to be in a right relationship with you and with other members of your creation. Father, we pray that you would help us to evaluate our own attitudes, our own motivations for the things that we say and the things that we do, and we pray especially, Lord, that as we look at this matter of feminist theology that you would cause each of us to evaluate our thinking and our attitudes in this area. So help us as we continue to study. For it’s in Christ’s name we pray it. Amen.

At the end of the last lecture, we were looking at what Johnson has to say about the methods and the criteria and the goal of feminist theology. Having laid all of these things out then, she turns to a discussion of speech about God specifically and asks and answers the question, What’s so bad about the way the Christian community speaks about God even now? Why is there need for a reforming of its methodology? In other words, Why does this feminist theology target such speech in its methods, criterion, and in its goal?

Johnson gives her basic reply on page 32, and she says that the answer is that “to even the casual observer, it is obvious that the Christian community ordinarily speaks about God on the model of the ruling male human being. Both the images that are used and the concepts accompanying them reflect the experience of men in charge within a patriarchal system. The difficulty does not
lie in the fact that male metaphors are used, for men too are made in the image of God and may suitably serve as finite beginning points for reference to God. Rather, the problem consists in the fact that these male terms are used exclusively, literally, and patriarchally.” And it’s those last three ideas—exclusive, literal, and patriarchal use of male metaphors—that she then picks up and then expands upon.

Let me share with you what she says by way of complaint. In terms of male metaphors being used exclusively, she says this: “In spite of the multitude of designations for divine mystery in the Bible and later lesser known sources, prevailing Christian language names God solely with male designations, causing the rest to be forgotten or marginalized. Thus, speech about God in female metaphors or in images taken from the natural world lies fallow and can even appear deviant. To give one outstanding example, liturgical prayer is directed to the Father, through the Son, in the unity of the Holy Spirit with even the latter being masculinized through the use of grammatically male pronouns.”

As to the problem that these metaphors are always used literally, here’s what she says. She says, “In spite of ample testimony in the Scriptures and later tradition that the mystery of God is beyond all human comprehension, the exclusively male symbol of God is spoken in an uncritically, literal way. Such speech signifies, if not in explicit theory, at least effectively in the subliminal power of the imagination, that maleness is an essential character of divine being. We have forgotten what was clear to early Christian thinkers; namely, that Father and Son are names that designate relationships, rather than an essence in itself, and that as applied to God, they, like all human finite names, are subject to the negation of the rule of analogy. It is true that sophisticated thinkers deny that the maleness of the symbol of God is meant to be taken literally, for divine being transcends sexual bodiliness. Yet the literal association of God with maleness perjures even in highly abstract discussion as exemplified in the statement, ‘God is not male; he is Spirit.’ The assumption of divine maleness comes to light in the cognitive dissonance set up by marginalized speech such as Julian of Norwich’s when it is said, ‘The mother can give her child to suck of her milk, but our precious mother, Jesus, can feed us with Himself and does most courteously and most tenderly with the blessed sacrament which is the precious food of true life.’”

Then Johnson says, “Such language provides an opportunity for divine mystery to be glimpsed when the noun mother and the
pronoun Himself grate against each other. By contrast, when words such as Father, King, Lord, Bridegroom, Husband, and God Himself are used, there is usually no sense of inappropriateness. The incidental implication of maleness seems to have slipped in as essential. This is demonstrated empirically by the dismay often registered when and if God is referred to with female images or pronouns. It is not meant that God is male when masculine imagery is used, if it is not meant that’s so, why the objection when female images are introduced? But, in fact, an intrinsic, literal connection between God and maleness is usually intended however implicitly.”

“Not only is there a problem that male metaphors are used exclusively and literally,” Johnson says, “but they are also used patriarchally.” And here’s what she says about this. She says, “The precise ideal from the world of men that has provided the paradigm for the symbol of God is the ruling man within a patriarchal system. Divine mystery is cast in the role of a monarch—absolute ruler, King of Kings, Lord of Lords—one whose will none can escape to whom is a total and unquestioning obedience. This powerful monarch is sometimes spoken of as just and harsh, threatening hellfire to sinners who do not measure up. But even when He is presented as kindly, merciful, and forgiving, the fundamental problem remains. Benevolent patriarchy is still patriarchy.”

Then she goes to give some examples of what she means, and let me mention a few that are offered here. She says, “The exclusive and literal patriarchy of the symbol of God goes forward in concrete metaphors and abstract concepts. In the history of Western art, the most common depiction of deity is that of an old, white man with a white beard. Recall Michelangelo’s image of God the Creator on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, calling to life a single, younger man in His own image. Imagery of the Trinitarian God most often consists of an older, white bearded man, a younger, brown bearded man, both Caucasian, and a dove. The power of these and other images as they give rise to thought insures that metaphysical descriptions of the divine nature also betray an androcentric bias. Even the most abstract theological concepts begin with and are still attached at some point to concrete models. To wit, Greek philosophical tradition equates the male principle with spirit, with mind and reason, and most importantly with act, reserving for the female principle a contrasting identification with matter, with the inferior body and passion, and most importantly, with potency. In this profoundly dualistic worldview, male is to female as autonomy is to dependence, as strength is to weakness, as
fullness is to emptiness, as dynamism is to stasis, as good is to evil. Since the divine principle is pure act and goodness, it necessarily must exclude all dependency, potency, passivity, and prime matter. The logic of this set up leads, inexorably to the conviction that the divine can properly be spoken of only on the model of the spiritually masculine to the exclusion of the passive material feminine.” And accordingly Johnson shows while Aquinas, for example, notes that the Scripture is a tribute to God the Father, what in our material world belongs to both father and mother, namely, the begetting of the Son, he nevertheless argues that God cannot be spoken of on the analogy of mother, for God is pure act, whereas, in the process of begetting, the mother represents the principle that receives passively. This assumption and its attendant androcentric presuppositions permeate the classical philosophical doctrine of God, as well as the specifically Christian doctrine of God’s Trinity, according to Johnson.

So that’s what the problem is with our typical Christian speech about God, and we need to change it. Johnson says not only are these the problems, but she says they have certain negative effects. They have on the one hand sociological and psychological effects, and on the other hand, there are theological effects of this use of language. As to sociological and psychological, Johnson says that “the patriarchal God symbolism functions to legitimate and reinforce patriarchal social structures in the family, in society, and in the church.” And she develops this point on page 36. “This symbolism,” she says, “also justifies the androcentric worldview of male superiority and female inferiority that accompanies such patriarchal structures,” and here, let me read to you what she says on page 37. She says, “This symbolism also justifies the androcentric worldview of male superiority and female inferiority that accompanies such structures. When God is envisioned in the image of one sex rather than both sexes, and in the image of the ruling class of this sex, then this group of men is seen to possess the image of God in a primary way. As Paul Tillich saw religious symbols are double-edged, directing attention both toward the infinite which they symbolize and toward the finite through which they symbolize it. Whenever a segment of reality is used as a symbol for God, the realm of reality from which it is taken is elevated into the realm of the holy becoming theonomous.” And as she later says then, “If God is called the King, something is said not only about God, but also about the holy character of kinghood. The human reality to point to God becomes by that very act consecrated, revealed in its own holy depths. This is a worthwhile and fruitful insight, but what results when the human
reality used to point to God is always and everywhere male? The sacred character of maleness is revealed while femaleness is relegated to the unholy darkness without. Such silence is typical of theological discourse shaped by an androcentric notion of humanity. The patriarchal symbol of the divine sculpts men into the role of God fully in ‘His’ image incapable of representing ‘Him’ while women thought to be only deficiently in the image of God and ultimate a symbol of evil, play the role of dependent and sinful humanity who when forgiven may then be recipients of grace or spiritual helpers. No one has yet summed up more piffily the total sociological and theological fallout of androcentric symbolism for the divine than Mary Daly with her apothem. ‘If God is male, than the male is God.’”

There are also some theological effects of this kind of thinking, and the theological result of exclusive male symbolism in regard to God, Johnson says, “is idolatry.” As to why this is so, let me read to you what she says on page 39, and here she gives an explanation of idolatry and then she’s going to link this to exclusive and literal and patriarchal usage of male metaphors in speaking of God. She says, “The effect of history of patriarchal speech about God also bears directly on the religious significance and truth of what is said about divine mystery. Feminist theological analysis makes clear that the tenacity with which the patriarchal symbol of God is upheld is nothing less than violation of the first commandment of the Decalogue, the worship of an idol. An idol is not necessarily a god in the shape of an animal, a golden calf or little statue with no breath that needs to be carried as described in the Hebrew Scriptures, rather any representation of the divine used in such a way that its symbolic and evocative character is lost from view partakes of the nature of an idol. Whenever one image or concept of God expands to the horizon, thus shutting out others, and whenever this exclusive symbol becomes literalized so that the distant between it and divine reality is collapsed, there an idol comes into being. Then the comprehensible image, rather than disclosing mystery is mistaken for the reality. Divine mystery is cramped into a fixed, petrified image. Simultaneously, the religious impulse is imprisoned, leading to inhibition of the growth of human beings by the prevention of further seeking and finding.”

Then you can figure what she’s going to say in terms of exclusively using male metaphors. That winds up being idolatry. She says, “What needs to be shattered according to feminist theological critique is the stranglehold on religious language of God-He.
Normative imaging and conceptualization of God on the model of ruling men alone, is theologically the equivalent of the graven image. A finite representation set up and worshipped as if it were the whole of divine reality. What is violated is both the creature’s limitation and the unknowable mystery of the living God. In spite of the tradition’s insistence on the radical incomprehensibility of God, in spite of the teaching that all words for God being finite fall short of their intended goal, and in spite of the presence of many names, images, and concepts for the divine in the Scripture and later Christian tradition, this tradition has lifted up the patriarchal way of being human to functional equivalence with the divine. More solid than stone, more resistant to iconoclasm than bronze, seems to be the ruling male substratum of the idea of God cast in theological language and engraved in public and private prayer.”

Then she says that “male symbols for God do not have to be idolatrous any more than exclusively female symbols would, but unfortunately it has turned out that they in fact are used in this way.” Let me read to you what she says as she sums up this whole issue on page 40. She says, “The above analysis does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that in a different context traditional male symbols of God, key among them the image of Father, could not function beneficently to point to the mystery of God. All good symbols of God drive toward their own transcendence and what is rejected as an idol may yet return as an icon—a vehicle of divine power and presence—in different circumstances. But in the concrete situation of patriarchy, such symbols in fact do not function to emancipate women, however much they may be adjusted toward kindness and other desirably characteristics. In such a situation, the burden of proof lies with the position that holds it exclusive and literal language about God as Father, King, and so forth, does in fact help to realize women’s flourishing. Pragmatically the proof is not forthcoming.”

If that’s the problem with our language about God, if it needs to incorporate elements that refer and relate to females as well as males, how then should we speak of God so as to incorporate female images in a way that will uphold equality of males and females as both the image of God and as both saying something instructive about the divine mystery that is God? How should we do that?

In her third chapter, Johnson informs us that there are really three basic options for speaking about God so as to incorporate female images, and these are three different ways that attempt
to accommodate the issues that she has raised so far. She looks at each one of them carefully, but she believes that the first two are deficient in one way or another. Before she turns to that, though, she raises the question of whether we should use the word *God* at all, given the traditional male connotations that have attached to it, and why it is that we should concern ourselves with female symbols for God. Why should we continue to use the word *God*, why is this even a question? She says, “In light of the way this term has been used in androcentric theology, one might think it best to abandon it altogether.” There’s the typical reaction that whenever you hear the word *God* you think of a male, a dominant ruling male. And because of that some feminists have tried to get rid of the word altogether; they have substituted other words such as referring to God as the Word or to talk about goddess. Johnson says she thinks that there are various problems with all of those, and she thinks that there’s a better way to handle this problem than getting rid of the word *God* altogether. She believes that the way to proceed is to still use the word *God* but to associate it with metaphors and values that arise from women’s experience, not just always associating it with male ideas and male values.

She then talks a little bit further about why female symbols for God would be appropriate, and she beings this section by claiming that the holy mystery of God, who God is, and what God is, is beyond all imagining. In light, then, of that incomprehensibility of God, it is entirely appropriate she says to speak of God in non-personal or suprapersonal terms. As a result, she says, “Think of what some theologians have used as their way of referring to God.” For example, there is Tillich’s reference to God “as the ground of being”; Rosemary Ruether’s “the matrix surrounding and sustaining all life”; Pannenberg’s phrase or term is “the power of the future”; and Karl Rahner’s phrase, “Holy mystery”—all of these are symbols that point to the divine reality. And we might be inclined to use that kind of language if it weren’t for the fact that God, even though He is incomprehensible, is surely not impersonal. He’s not less than personal. As a matter of fact, many of the most valued characteristics of God’s relationship to the world, Johnson says, “characteristics like fidelity and compassion and liberating love, things like that belong to the human world and as such they are very personal concepts.” If that’s going to be the case, then to talk about God solely as “the ground of being” or “the matrix surround and sustaining all life,” something like that, is going to remove too much the personal element in God. But Johnson then says if you are going to speak of God then in personal terms, then the question arises which person should be
the focus of our talk about God? Should it be males or should it be females?

Here’s what she has to say about this, and I quote her from page 45. She says, “Here is where the question of gender arises. Given the powerful ways the ruling male metaphor has expanded to become an entire metaphysical worldview, and the way it perjures in imagination, even when gender neutral God language is used, correction of androcentric speech on the level of the concept alone is not sufficient. Since, as Marcia Falk notes, ‘Dead metaphors make strong idols,’ other images must be introduced which shatter the exclusivity of the male metaphor, subvert its dominance, and set free a greater sense of the mystery of God.”

But even here, as she notes, if you use female symbols to speak of God, you must likewise be careful not to introduce stereotypes of women when you talk of God. I mean, just as there are certain traits that are stereotypically associated with males and then those are projected onto God, there are also certain traits that are stereotypically associated with females and if you take those stereotypes and project them on God, you’re not doing women any favor. It appears that you’re legitimizing the system of patriarchal structures that “attempts to put women in their place,” a place which is out of the line of any kind of significant activity in society.

Let me read to you what she has to say by explanation of this problem. She says, “One effective way,” this is from page 45, “to stretch language and expand our repertoire of images is by uttering female symbols into speech about divine mystery. It is a complex exercise, not necessarily leading to emancipatory speech. An old danger that accompanies this challenge is that such language may be taken literally. A new danger lies in the potential for stereotyping women’s reality by characterizing God simply as nurturing, caring, and so forth.” The benefits, however, in my judgment, outweigh the dangers, even though she said that there can be problems, she still thinks, yes there’s the downside of this, let’s use female symbols anyway, let’s just be careful that we don’t use that as a basis for stereotyping women and projecting those stereotypes onto God as the only qualities about women that might point to God at all.

As to why this matter of symbols is such a key issue, Johnson explains that it is through imaginative constructs that the world is mediated to us. This is the way we think about things. Hence, images of God that we have are not peripheral or dispensable to
theological speech; they are central to it. And if that’s the case, then the kind of images, the kinds of symbols we use to think about God are very much going to color not only our perspective of God but of the world and how human beings ought to relate to one another.

So let’s grant that we ought to speak about God in feminine symbols; then how would we best go about doing this? It’s at this point that Johnson sets forth three possible ways to incorporate female symbols and imagery into our talk about God. Each one of them has a certain benefit to it, and each one offers a certain advance over thinking exclusively in terms of male metaphors for God, but Johnson is very, very clear that it’s only the third one of these options that she finds acceptable. Let’s take a look at each of these three options and see what Johnson says about them as to why the first two are problematic and the third is much more acceptable.

The first way to introduce feminine symbols and imagery into our talk about God is to simply give feminine qualities to God, but in this case God is still nevertheless imagined predominantly as a male person. A male person, though, whose picture we are softening by adding certain feminine qualities to the description of God. Now if you follow this option, Johnson says, “the typical traits that will be attributed to God are gentle nurturing traits traditionally associated with the mothering role of women.” On the one hand this has the positive effect of softening the symbol of God as Father, which unfortunately traditionally has certain unlovely traits associated with ruling men in a male-oriented society; that is, traits like aggressiveness, competitiveness, desire for absolute power and control, and a demand for obedience. If you add feminine traits to God, you then will portray God as having the qualities of gentleness and compassion, unconditional love, reverence and care for the weak, sensitivity and desire not to dominate, but to be an intimate companion and friend, and all of these traits are traits that make God much more attractive to people and soften those typically negative male characteristics we mentioned just a few moments ago.

If all of those positive things can be accomplished by speaking of God in this way by adding certain feminine traits to God, why not use this as the approach? Johnson says that in spite of the positive things that can be added to the concept of God by doing this, women theologians are virtually unanimous in calling attention to the deficiencies of this approach, and there are three
in particular. The first one is that if you follow this approach to speaking about God, the androcentric pattern still holds. Why? Because God is still envisioned in the image of the ruling man. God possesses some feminine traits, but these are subordinate to an overall symbol that remains masculine. Evidence of this in part appears from the fact that God is repeatedly referred to as “Him” by people who use this strategy.

A second problem is, and I quote her here, this is from page 49, “The legitimacy of the rigid binary system into which it”—that is, this approach to introducing feminine speech into our discussions and language about God—“forces thought about human beings and reality itself. Enormous diversity,” and she means diversity between men and women, as well as the different ideas that one might attribute to God, “is reduced to two relatively opposed absolutes of masculine and feminine, and this is imposed on the infinite mystery of God.”

There’s a third problem with this approach, and here I quote again from page 49. She says, “This approach also involves dubious stereotyping of certain human characteristics as predominantly masculine or feminine.” She then says, “Even as debate waxes over the distinction between sex and gender, and about whether and to what extent typical characteristics of men and women exist by nature, or cultural conditioning, simple critical observation reveals that the spectrum of traits is at least as broad among concrete historical women as between women and men. In the light of the gospel, by what right are compassion, love, reverence, and nurturing predicated as primordially feminine characteristics rather than human ones? Why are strength, sovereignty, and rationality exclusively masculine properties? As Rosemary Reuther astutely formulates the fundamental question, is it not the case that the very concept of the feminine is a patriarchal invention? An ideal projected onto women by men and vigorously defended because it functions so well to keep men in positions of power and women in positions of service to them? Masculine and feminine are among the most culturally stereotyped terms in the language. This is not to say that there are no differences between women and men, but it is to question the justification of the present distribution of virtues and attributes and to find it less than compelling as a description of reality. Such stereotyping serves the genuine humanity of neither women nor men and feeds an anthropological dualism almost impossible to overcome. Adding feminine traits to the male image God furthers the subordination of women by making the patriarchal symbol
less threatening, more attractive. This approach does not, then, serve well for speech about God in a more inclusive and liberating fashion."

If adding feminine traits to God is not going to accomplish what we want, then what about another option? This brings Johnson to a second option for speaking about God in female symbols. This option seeks a more ontological footing for the existence of the feminine in God, and here I quote what she said. She says, “Most frequently that inroad is found in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit who in classical Trinitarian theology is coequal in nature with the Father and the Son.” Now why the Spirit is seen as the appropriate dimension of the Godhead to be feminine is explained by Johnson herself. Let me, if I may, read to you one paragraph on page 50 where she gives that explanation.

She says, “Most frequently that inroad is found,” that is, that inroad into the Godhead, “in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, who in classical Trinitarian theology is coequal in nature with the Father and the Son. In the Hebrew Scriptures the Spirit is allied with female reality as can be seen not only by the grammatical feminine gender of the term [ruach], which in itself proves nothing, but also by the use of the female imagery of the mother bird hovering or brooding to bring forth life. Imagery associated with the Spirit of God in creation (Genesis 1:2) and at the conception and baptism of Jesus (Luke 1:35; 3:22). . . . [e]arly Christians did construe the divine Spirit in female terms, attributing to the Spirit the motherly character which certain parts of the Scriptures had already found in Israel’s God. The Spirit is the creative, maternal God who brings about the incarnation of Christ, new members of the body of Christ in the waters of baptism, and the body of Christ through the epiclesis of the Eucharist. In time, the custom of speaking about the Spirit in female terms waned in the West, along with the habit of speaking very extensively about the Spirit at all.”

This may seem to be a better way to go than generally attributing some female characteristics to God. Now you have one member of the Godhead who is actually thought of as more female than male, but Johnson says this is still a problem. An initial problem with this approach is that, and I quote her, “The endemic difficulty of Spirit theology in the West ensures that this person remains rather unclear and invisible.” She says, “A deeper theology of the Holy Spirit, notes Walter Kasper in another connection, stands before the difficulty that unlike the Father and Son, the Holy Spirit
is faceless. While the Son has appeared in human form and while we can at least make a mental image of the Father, the Spirit is not graphic and remains theologically the most mysterious of the three divine persons.” For all practical purposes, we end up with two clear masculine images and an anamorphous feminine third. So if you conceive of the Holy Spirit as the female member of the Godhead, this isn’t going to get you beyond sexism, androcentrism, patriarchy because that third member of the Godhead is not very well defined and seems to be subordinate in our concepts, as well as perhaps subordinate to other members of the Godhead and subordinate to the male paradigm of Father and Son.

A second problem with this approach is that the overarching approach or framework of this approach to speaking about God still remains androcentric. The male principle is still dominant and sovereign. Here’s what she says about this: “The Spirit, even as God, remains the third person. Easily subordinated to the other two, since she proceeds from them and is sent by them to mediate their presence and bring to completion what they have initiated. The direction in which this leads may be seen in Franz Meyer’s attempt to understand the Holy Spirit as mother on the analogy of family relationships. If we liberate motherhood from a naturalistic concept and see it in its existential social reality, then we can indeed see how the mother comes from the Father and the Son; that is, how she receives her existential stamp and identity from them both within the family.” Then Johnson says, “As even a passing feminist analysis makes clear, while intending to rehabilitate the feminine, Meyer has again accomplished a subordination in unequal relationships.”

There’s another problem, and it was a problem that she raised with the first option. It’s a problem with the second option as well, namely, the problem of stereotyping women is something that plagues this approach. Let me read to you what she has to say from page 51. “The problem of stereotyping also plagues this approach. More often than not, those who use it associate the feminine with unconscious dreams and fantasies, . . ., or with nature, instinct, and bodiliness, . . ., or with prime matter, as does Meyer, all of which is then predicated of God through the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The equation is thus set up. Male is to female as transcendence is to imminence, with the feminine Spirit restricted to the role of bearing the presence of God to our interiority. This stereotyping appears even in a creative attempt by process theologian, John B. Cobb, to come to grips with the charge of idolatry of the male in worship and thought. While
acknowledging that currently the received polarity of feminine and masculine is subject to redescription, he goes on to identify the logos, the masculine aspect of God, with order, novelty, demand, agency transformation, and the Spirit, the feminine aspect of God with receptivity, empathy, suffering, preservation. The lines are drawn,” Johnson said. “The logos provides ever new initial aims and lures us always forward, while the feminine aspect of God responds tenderly to our failures and successes, assures us that whatever happens we are loved, and achieves in her totality a harmonious wholeness of all that is. There is real danger that simply identifying the Spirit with feminine reality leads the overall symbol of God fundamentally unreformed and boxes actual women into a stereotypical ideal.”

As another example of this kind of problem, Johnson then talks about Leonardo Boff’s essay on Mary as the maternal face of God. In that essay he holds that the Holy Spirit is the person in the Trinity who appropriates the feminine in a unique way and who can be said to have feminine, especially maternal, traits. What the feminine consists of is described philosophically and theologically under the primary rubric of the Jungian anima. Maternity, which Boff sees as constitutive of the personhood of women, accords primarily with love and self-giving, which are classical names for the Spirit. What is unique about this discussion is the novel hypothesis according to which the feminine dimension of the Spirit is worked out in affinity with the person of the virgin Mary. In analogy with the incarnation of the Word in Jesus, the Spirit divinizes the feminine in the person of Mary, who in turn is to be regarded as hypostatically united to the third person of the blessed Trinity for the benefit of all womankind.

As she says, “The simplest feminist analysis makes clear that in the case of actual women in all of their historical concreteness, the categories of virgin and mother come nowhere near summing up the totality of what is possible for women’s self-realization. Furthermore, even Boff’s analysis of the feminine in relation to the virgin Mary runs aground finally on the rocks of inconsistency. His moving depiction of Mary as a prophetic woman of liberation announcing God’s justice in her Magnificat [runs] counter to his other descriptions of her of her participating in salvation silently and unassumingly according to the norm of the feminine.” So you can see the problem that comes with that kind of portrayal of God.

She gives some further examples of why this is problematic, and let me then give to you what she says by way of some key objections
to this type of thinking. She says, “A difficulty ensues with this correlation between the Spirit, the feminine archetype, and the situation of women. Jungian archetypes are open to the charge of sexism, not necessarily in the sense of being misogynists, which notion Gelpi,” the person Donald Gelpi (she has been discussing his work), “seeks to allay, but insofar as they shrink the identity of the vast range of concrete in different women into present characteristics and limit their options to historically predetermined roles. These roles are culturally conditioned by the society in which Jung lived and do not include intellectual, artistic, or public leadership.”

Then a little bit later she says, “In a church rigorously structured by patriarchal hierarchy, a Dominican, a Franciscan, and a Jesuit,” this is her summary of the people examples she’s discussed, “have tried to alleviate the sexism of the central symbol for God by imaging the Holy Spirit as feminine.” I for one appreciate their efforts even as I criticize their results. The good will of these men is palpable and their intent is positive, yet their methodological options ensure that they do not listen to women’s own self-definitions but develop a one-sided view of the feminine structurally conducive to the public power and private well-being of men. Besides the very real question of whether nature or culture shapes these descriptions of feminine roles, their effect on the being and function of concrete historical women is deleterious and restrictive.