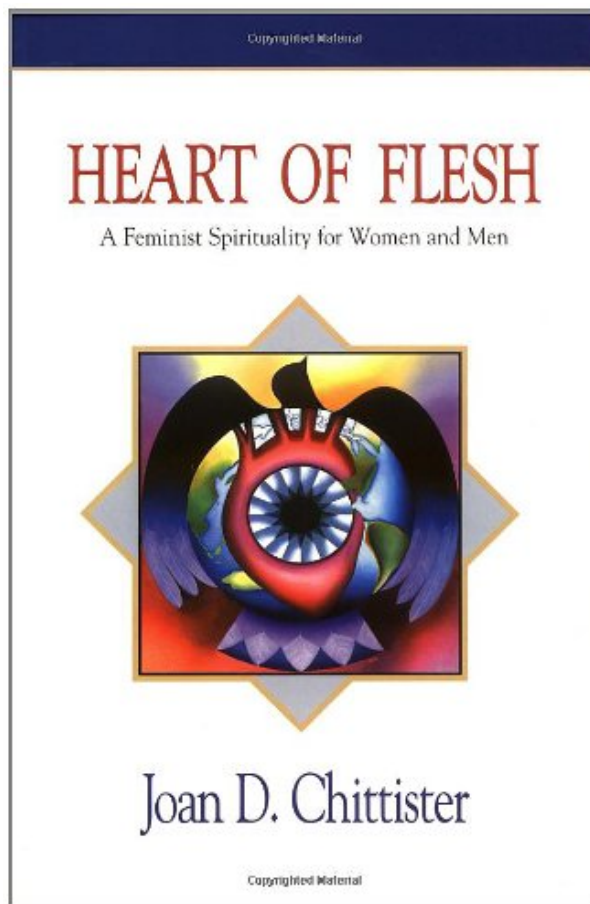


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A Feminist Spirituality for Women and Men



Joan D. Chittister

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From Library Journal

A noted author, lecturer, and Benedictine nun, Chittister considers feminist spirituality to be the true essence and full potential of Christianity. Analyzing the history of patriarchal thinking, she shows how its tendency toward violence, authoritarian domination, and dualistic theology diminishes both women and men. The feminist spirituality she envisions is modeled after the radical example of Jesus, whose human vulnerability and compassion gave him strength to love the sick, the poor, and society's outcasts equally and to resist evil and injustice without violence. Chittister writes with a rare blend of accessible scholarship and impassioned eloquence. Highly recommended for women's studies and general collections.

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What does it mean to live out a feminist spirituality in a world that glamorizes violence and legitimizes domination?

Best-selling author Joan Chittister takes a very real look at what it means to have a feminist spirituality--a "heart of flesh"--in today's culture. She unmaskes the effects of sexism on both men and women and describes a spirituality that makes healthier, happier human beings of us all.

According to Chittister, the patriarchal culture that has shaped our world has also brought us to the edge of destruction with its dualisms, hierarchies, and inequality. She outlines the historical realities that produced this situation and describes how patriarchal culture and spirituality maintain their hold on us. She then argues that there is another way which is better and introduces us to a feminist worldview that, in recognizing the full humanity of women, leads all of us to new, better ways of being and relating.

Heart of Flesh: A Feminist Spirituality for Women and Men offers a dynamic vision of spirituality from one of our finest writers of spiritual literature.

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Most helpful customer reviews

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Feminism at the heart of the Gospel

By JTD

In Heart of Flesh, Joan Chittister grapples with feminism as a matter of ultimate importance. She writes in a

flowing, authoritative style with minimal critical apparatus and the accompanying witness of bold artwork by Nancy Earle. Her observations are grounded in extensive engagement with theology and social science research and a lifetime of committed yet critical involvement in the Catholic Church. A Benedictine leader known for her social activism, Sister Joan gives a ringing call to feminists to embrace spirituality and Christian women and men to embrace feminism, for the sake of our relationships with each other, the well-being of the planet, and faithfulness to God.

Chittister employs the 6th-century Rule of Benedict to elaborate dimensions of feminist spirituality. Benedict formulated his counter-cultural rule for "Roman men, who had been formed in a totally patriarchal society, a society that institutionalized power, hierarchy, and dominance" (97). The Benedictine approach with its emphasis on humility and non-hierarchical decision-making challenges the patriarchal church as well as the will to power that fuels secular society. The call to humility carries an inherent danger for women, however, since women have heard through the ages a destructive call to subservience; hence, Chittister must carefully differentiate between the perversions of patriarchy and a liberating humility that leads to both inner and public peace.

Throughout the book, Chittister references the damage done to both women and men by patriarchy. She does a fine job of showing connections to structural injustices and advocating for nonviolence and empowerment of the oppressed. Feminism is presented as a worldview that "makes humans of us all" (4). God speaks in Scripture about removing our hearts of stone and giving us hearts of flesh so that our humanity will be restored (175). Without attempting a full Christology, Chittister refers to Jesus as the model feminist. At points, she describes feminism in terms that most would reserve for Christ: "Feminism comes to bring both men and women to the fullness of life, the wholeness of soul, for which we were all made in the image and likeness of God" (37).

Heart of Flesh offers a helpful corrective to feminist arguments that ignore male health, on the one hand, and domesticate God, on the other hand. Joan Chittister holds reverence for God and God's revelation together with an ecofeminist vision of creation in which power, responsibility, and vulnerability are shared. Each aspect of her analysis is illustrated by a story from her own journey of learning to name patriarchal distortions and voice feminist correctives. In its breadth and mature wisdom, this volume offers a compelling challenge to see feminism at the heart of the Gospel message.

35 of 36 people found the following review helpful.

Rarely does one find such an accessible work

By Sophia

This book is one of the best, well-balanced, thoroughly-discussed commentaries on Christianity, feminism, and liberation theology that I have ever read. Although she makes no secret of her political or spiritual views, Dr. Chittister places them in context, sharing anecdotes and stories as a means for getting her point across. She also manages to detoxify such "buzz words" as "feminism" and clarify why "Westernization" meets with such strong resistance in other cultures

In addition to covering the "same old ground" (as I've heard it described) of why traditional hurts women, Dr. Chittister also illustrates how it harms men, society, and the earth; and points out how it differs from the way Jesus related to people - inclusive, peaceful, healing and compassionate. This book points to a more respectful and open theology. A brilliant, balanced, and compassionate work.

50 of 53 people found the following review helpful.

Do you know what feminism means?

By A Customer

After reading this book and attending a week long retreat on it, I must recommend it. It clarifies what a feminist is, and how Jesus was one himself. It points out how patriarchy has interpreted the bible and defined

men and womens role - to the detriment of the world. This book is not just 'opinion' but well researched. She shows us the biblical point of view that is against the hierarchy, violence, oppression, consumerism, sexism, racism, and ecological destruction of today's global mindset. This book points the way to a Godly, peaceful, inclusive, co-creative, feeling, empathetic, non-dualistic, empowering of all people and sexes. You won't know what feminism is till you read this, and why it is for both sexes and for the survival of the world. Hope I've tempted you to read it and learn for yourself. Don't rely on what you 'think' you know about this subject. Don't get hung up on the word.

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