

## Bishops reaffirm: 'Quest for Living God' not adequate theology

NCR Staff | Oct. 28, 2011



Sr. Elizabeth Johnson

In a statement released this morning from the United States Catholic Conference, the bishops' Committee on Doctrine reaffirms their March critique of the book *'Quest For The Living God'* By St. Joseph Sr. Elizabeth Johnson, saying again that it is an inadequate expression of Catholic Faith.

Following is the press release from the U.S. bishops conference about the statement and then a link the full statement, which is titled *'Response to Observations by Sr. Elizabeth A. Johnson, C.S.J., Regarding the Committee on Doctrine's Statement about the Book Quest for the Living God.'*

**UPDATE:** For Johnson's response this morning to the bishops' latest statement, see: [Johnson: Bishops' latest 'paints incorrect picture' of book](#) [1]

### **BISHOPS REAFFIRM THEIR CRITIQUE OF BOOK QUEST FOR THE LIVING GOD BY SISTER ELIZABETH JOHNSON**

Further study confirms committee's judgment about book  
Attempt at new theological expression inadequate to Catholic faith  
Have concern that book being used as textbook

WASHINGTON—The Committee on Doctrine of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has released a statement reaffirming its critique of *Quest for the Living God*, a book by Fordham University Professor Sister Elizabeth A. Johnson, CSJ.

The Doctrine Committee first criticized the book in a 21-page statement published on March 24. Sister Johnson responded June 1 with a 38-page defense titled *'To Speak Rightly of the Living God: Observations by Dr. Elizabeth A. Johnson, CSJ, on the Statement of the Committee on Doctrine of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops about Her Book Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God.'*

In these *'Observations,'* Sister Johnson asserted that the Committee on Doctrine had *'thoroughly*

misunderstood and consistently misrepresented? the book.

Over the summer the Committee studied Sister Johnson's ?Observations? and today made public its findings in a statement dated October 11, ?Response to Observations by Sr. Elizabeth A. Johnson, C.S.J., Regarding the Committee on Doctrine's Statement about the Book Quest for the Living God.?

In its ?Response,? the Committee reviews the arguments presented by Sister Johnson in defense of her book and answers by going into greater detail in its analysis of the central issues, with further documentation in terms of citations from the book.

At the conclusion of its study of the ?Observations,? the Committee concludes that ?they have not in fact demonstrated that the Committee has misunderstood or misrepresented the book. Rather, the Committee finds itself confirmed in its judgments about the book.?

The Committee notes that one of Sister Johnson's central arguments was that she was attempting to express the faith of the Church in new and creative ways that would be appropriate to the contemporary situation, whereas the Committee was operating out of a narrow theological framework and would only accept the repetition of traditional formulas.

The Committee concurs that ?the task of theological reflection is never accomplished by the mere repetition of formulas,? but goes on to assert that the ?real issue is whether or not new attempts at theological understanding are faithful to the deposit of faith as contained in the Scriptures and the Church's doctrinal tradition.?

The Committee comes to the conclusion that ?the language used in the book does not adequately express the faith of the Church.?

The Committee commends Sister Johnson ?for her stated intention to help the Church progress in her understanding of divine realities,? but says that the book fails to fulfill this task, ?because it does not sufficiently ground itself in the Catholic theological tradition as its starting point.?

The Committee points out that the book is "a particular pastoral concern" for the bishops "because it is written for a ?broad audience? rather than a more narrow scholarly audience.?"

?Furthermore,? it adds, ?whether or not the book was originally designed specifically to be a textbook, the book is in fact being used as a textbook for the study of the doctrine of God.?

?Having examined both the book and the Observations in detail, the Committee on Doctrine believes that it is its duty to state publicly that on several critical points the book is seriously inadequate as a presentation of the Catholic understanding of God.?

The text of the Committee on Doctrine's ?Response? can be found here: [Response to Observations by Sr. Elizabeth A. Johnson, C.S.J., Regarding the Committee on Doctrine's Statement about the Book Quest for the Living God](#) [2].

You can also read Sr. Johnson's response [here](#) [3].

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[1] <http://ncronline.org/node/27323/>

[2] <http://ncrnews.org/documents/statement-quest-for-the-living-god-response-2011-10-11.pdf>

[3] <http://cnsblog.wordpress.com/2011/10/28/response-from-sister-elizabeth-johnson-to-us-bishops-committee-on-doctrines-latest-statement/>

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