



# God in a Red Dress

Reflecting on the inauguration of Donald Trump, Michael Higgins,<sup>1</sup> Canadian theologian and writer, ended his blog as follows:

**“Trump likes God on his side and feels in his bones that God saved him from an assassin’s bullet and that, as a consequence, he is the Chosen One. I think God might have a different view. My God, at least.”**

It poses a question for all of us to ponder: **who is ‘My God’?** Jesus challenges his disciples in a similar way: **“Who do you say that I am?”** Perhaps we could add the word **NOW** to our question about God? Our image of God evolves over time, shaped by so many factors. The following extract from an article<sup>2</sup> written in 2006 invites us to reflect on our own experiences and images of God and how they shape what we think and do.

“In my earliest memories of God, she is wearing a red dress, and dancing in an overgrown garden. She’s beautiful and entrancing, in a wild, glorious, untamed way. She would invite me to dance too, in my imagination. And I longed to, but I was a little shy. She was so alive. She was life. Glorious, rich, feisty. God.

I don’t know where she came from in my imagination. Unsurprisingly, she bore no resemblance to the God of my Sunday School teachers or of my parents. I knew enough not to talk about her, and after a while she was overtaken by the sensible, rational, and somewhat more prosaic version of God. She never disappeared though, she was just relegated to a back cupboard in my imagination, to appear and be dusted off years later when I found Anna Oneglia’s painting of a woman in a red dress, dancing, in a London gallery. I recognised God immediately.

In my meanderings through Christian theology, it was a relief to discover this statement from Sallie McFague:

**“There is a power at work in the universe, on the side of life and all its fulfilment”<sup>3</sup>** It was the first theology I’d read that made sense of the God I knew — God wearing a red dress, dancing in the garden. It’s the God whose presence I recognise in the world — and even in the Bible (though sometimes cunningly disguised in the Sunday School curriculum of my childhood) — **a power who is on the side of life. Irrepressible, relentless, unstoppable.”**

<sup>1</sup>**Michael Higgins:** Professor Emeritus of Sacred Heart University, Affiliate Professor of Graduate Studies at the San Antonio Oblate School of Theology, Basilian Distinguished Fellow of Contemporary Catholic Thought, University of Toronto.

<sup>2</sup>**Cheryl Lawrie:** Australian poet, artist, working in the areas of justice, community services, prisons

<sup>3</sup>**Sallie McFague** (d. 2019), best known for her analysis of metaphor at the heart of how Christians may speak about God, applying this to ecological issues, writing on care for the Earth as if it were God’s “body.” Distinguished Theologian in Residence at the Vancouver School of Theology