

## **TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF NATURE: PRELIMINARY INTUITIONS**

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### **Introduction**

Our current ecological crisis makes it imperative that a new theology of nature be formulated. The Western classical tradition has come under attack — and to some extent rightly — as a contributor to the present predicament. While I do not agree that *all* the blame can be laid at this door, in a state of affairs so complex and multifaceted, I do wonder what part Western classical tradition has played. To what extent has it provided ideological underpinnings which have supported habits of thinking and acting without a proper regard for environmental consequences? At the very least the challenge being issued is an invitation to theologians to reexamine our understanding of the relation between God and the world and perhaps move toward a

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<sup>1</sup> McFague qualifies her position further in her more recent book, *The Body of God*. Here she offers an even more finely nuanced presentation and seeks to respond to charges brought against her original proposal, charges of pantheism and of having let go of transcendence. It becomes clear in this later work that she intends a pantheistic rather than a pantheistic reading of the God-world relation. However, in my opinion, her continued use of the model of the world as God's body strains against the conceptual interpretation she intends for the very reasons offered in this paper. With every attempt to show how the mind "transcends" the body, the heretofore rejected dualism reemerges unwelcome. I wonder whether her case could be helped by further exploration of the process metaphysical framework (Whitehead's philosophy of organism, panpsychism, etc.).

new theology of nature that can better ground our common struggle for the fate of the earth.

Formulations of the God-world relation which have emerged from classical theism do present a difficulty. Divine perfections have been defined over against the attributes of the natural world; *supernature over against nature*.

<i>God</i>	<i>Nature</i>
necessary	contingent
eternal	temporal
unchanging	changing
absolute	relative

A mutual exclusion and opposition has been "structured in". This arrangement makes difficult any credible account of divine presence in and interaction with the world. The divine perfections posited effectively remove God from the natural world, a step which may make thinkable — and may even promote — the exploitation and violation of the creation which has been the legacy of Western classical tradition.

### **A Feminist Critique**

A substantial and damaging critique has been brought by feminist thinkers. The classical construction of God's relation to the world assumes a dualism. It is part of a larger and interconnected dualistic schema of graded differentiations:

God	world
man	woman
soul	body
culture	nature
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mind	matter
light	darkness
good	evil

The dualistic framework is not to be viewed as a harmless, though false, oversimplification of reality, for in each of its manifestations it leads to a justification of domination of one in the pair over the other. This is a *graded* differentiation in which it is assumed that one in each pair is superior and by all rights *should* rule over the other (man over woman, culture over nature, etc.).

As the effort to dominate and control persons and groups of people has led to disaster in the human realm, so it is with the natural realm. High priority has been attached to subduing and controlling nature. An adversarial "man-against-nature" relation is fostered. Each cultural advance in technical, controlling, knowledge is greeted as a triumph. The operative understanding seems to be that nature is there to subdue and press into the service of human beings. Yet the domination and control of nature has led us to the brink of disaster.

Within a brief century and a half the optimistic vision of expanding control, leading to Paradise takes on the frightening visage of global disaster, the universal outbreak of uncontrollable pollution, famine, poverty and warfare, which threatens the very survival of the planet (Ruether, SG, p. 94).

The oppression of woman and the oppression of nature are part of the same web of oppression. The feminist project must be broadly conceived. The dualistic system of graded differentiation must be unmasked and dismantled. The dominant system — the dominating system — must yield to radically transformed relations of human beings with one another and with nature. Feminists who readily recognize the interconnection of this web of oppressions tend to cast their discussion of environmental ethics in terms of "eco-justice" rather than simply "ecology" which seeks to systematically undo social/economic/political dominations. This entails a rethinking of the whole dualistic framework and all its component parts. The present project addresses one dualism, the traditional understanding of the relation between God and the world.

### **God's World as God's Body**

An alternative being proposed for overcoming the God-World dualism is to assume complete identity between God and the world. Grace Jantzen articulates this alternative in her book, *God's World/God's Body*. Sallie McFague, adopts this position, though in a qualified form<sup>2</sup>, in her book *Model's of God* where she proposes that we think of the world as God's body. I will explore their proposals each in turn.

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<sup>2</sup> Nature cannot be treated in a cavalier manner more recent book, *The Body of God*. Here she offers an even more finely nuanced presentation and seeks to respond to charges brought against her original proposal, charges of pantheism and of having let go of transcendence. It becomes clear in this later work that she intends a pantheistic rather than a pantheistic reading of the God-world relation. However, in my opinion, her continued use of the model of the world as God's body strains against the conceptual interpretation she intends for the very reasons offered in this paper. With every attempt to show how the mind "transcends" the body, the heretofore rejected dualism reemerges unwelcome. I wonder whether her case could be helped by further exploration of the process metaphysical framework (Whitehead's philosophy of organism, panpsychism, etc.).

Jantzen means to lay aside fully and finally any dualistic perception of reality. She takes a holistic view of the human being as her point of departure and there refutes the traditional mind-body dualism. She perceives the human body as an embodiment of the self and works analogically to claim that the cosmos is the embodiment of God's self. Jantzen seems to work from an unquestioned assumption that the mind *really is* to the body as God is to the world. This is where she differs from McFague who adopts the model more heuristically than ontologically and maintains the metaphorical, "is-is, not" character of the model. Jantzen holds the metaphor with a much tighter grip.

As Jantzen argues for the world as the embodiment of God, what seems to be at stake in this for her is the conviction of God's personal nature and intimate relation to the world and of God's action in the world as being something other than supernatural intervention from *outside*. She seeks to disestablish classical theism in part because it cannot offer a coherent articulation of these convictions.

Jantzen has a good and well-argued case against classical theism, but that in itself does not yet supply a positive case for divine embodiment, much less establish the necessity of adopting the alternative she proposes.

McFague has taken a similar stance, that the world may indeed be thought of as God's body. She, however, articulates the positive case for this alternative vision. I would therefore like to add her voice to Jantzen's to make the case stronger still before I raise my objections.

One advantage McFague sees is that this alternative aids us in affirming divine personhood in ways *congruent* with our contemporary understanding of personhood.

In view of the contemporary holistic understanding of personhood, in which embodiment is the *sine qua non*, the thought of an embodied

personal deity is not more incredible than that of a disembodied one (McFague, MG, p. 69).

She goes on to note that this alternative serves well in giving an account of God's knowledge of the world as internal, empathetic, and intimate knowing. God's action in the world is similarly interior and caring, acting from within, through complex physical and historico-cultural evolutionary processes rather than intervening and manipulating from outside (McFague, MG, p. 73).

The metaphor of the world as God's body also makes clear that God is "at risk" in relation to the world. God cares about and is affected by what happens in the world. God is vulnerable in a way a disembodied God would not be. This affirmation is "a way to remythologize the inclusive suffering love of the cross of Jesus of Nazareth. In both instances, God is at risk in human hands" (McFague, p. 72).

Last, and perhaps most to the point for this paper, such an image has important implications for human ethical responsibility. The world must be treated with greater reverence if it is God's body.<sup>3</sup> The metaphor entails an affirmation and elevation of nature and of embodiment in general that offers a stark contrast to the anti-matter, anti-body tradition within Christianity which may have contributed to the present ecological crisis.<sup>4</sup>

The positive values to be drawn from this model are indeed appealing: offering a more coherent account of divine personhood, giving a more plausible account of God's knowledge of and action in the world, witnessing to God's vulnerable, suffering love, and

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<sup>3</sup> Nature cannot be treated in a cavalier manner as alien or devoid of intrinsic significance and worth (Jantzen, p. 157).

<sup>4</sup> Salvation has been anthropomorphic in its focus so that nature has been viewed as a kind of backdrop for the drama of salvation and God's work of making "all things new" has not been recognized. And the salvation has been overly spiritualized so that social and economic needs have been deemed irrelevant.

issuing a compelling call to human responsibility in the project of eco-justice. All these seem essential to any faithful, contemporary concept of God. The question remains however, whether declaring that God's world is God's body is the only or even the best way to make these important affirmations.

## Objections

First a minor quarrel. I wonder if this particular analogy is not ill-fated from the outset. Is it not more than a little risky to borrow the old mind-body duality that has carried dualistic baggage with it for so long? We could easily fall back into the very thought habits of graded differentiation and domination which we are trying to unmask and dismantle.

I also question whether this analogy rings true to our experience. We experience our bodies as having the unity that attends organisms and we know something of how an organism behaves. But we do not experience the world behaving in this way as a unified organism.<sup>5</sup> While we may be substantially and vitally interconnected and interdependent we are not a unity analogous to a single organism's unity but rather a vast diversity of creatures.

Furthermore, can it be said that we experience ourselves as being in a part-to-whole relationship with the world or with God? Do we not rather experience ourselves as having a greater degree of personal wholeness, integrity, and autonomy (and consequently moral responsibility) than that image conveys? Most testify to experience as another "Thou" in relation to God, not as little parts of God.<sup>6</sup>

Another objection which can be raised is that many of the anomalies that attended the God-world relation portrayed in classical theism reassert themselves here. If what goes on in the

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<sup>5</sup> The world does not have "as much unity and coordination as the body of an organism" (Barbour, p. 177). "My body is an organism; to all evidence, the universe is no such thing... the universe is not a whole" (Farrer, p. 207).

<sup>6</sup> «(T)he relation of our activity to God's causality... cannot be the simple relation of part to whole; for if our will, our action is a mere part of God's, we can have no adjustment to make of ours to his... It is taken to be a moral relation... to another active self, only not "out there", but in the ground of our being» (Farrer, p. 202).

world is really nothing other than the conscious, purposive activity of God's body, then natural laws and the pervasive presence of evil in world process are difficult to incorporate. It should be noted in all fairness that these same elements were equally difficult to incorporate in the framework of classical theism, with its assumptions of divine intervention and divine omnipotence. These perplexities are not made worse by the pantheistic proposal, but neither are they made any better.

The charge most often levied against these two is that in this model God and the world are so totally identified that transcendence collapses into immanence. When McFague and Jantzen want to defend themselves against the charge of letting go of transcendence they appeal, though it may seem odd, to a modified form of mind-body dualism. McFague comments that, "Other animals may be said to be bodies that have spirit; we may be said to be spirits that have bodies" (McFague, MG, p. 71).<sup>7</sup> Can it really be said that we "have" our bodies, is it not more that we *are* embodied? No one ever says, "Here I am, and I have brought my body with me" (Whitehead, MT, p. 114). If there is a "more than" that can be claimed in this analogy, it is a very modest "more than". Is this very modest "more than", enough to justify the use of the term transcendence? Seems to me we have usually meant *more than that* by the term.

There is a double danger in identifying God and the world. The pantheistic option lets go of divine transcendence on the one hand and it lets go of the alitarity and integrity of the creation on the other. It is the second danger which does not seem to be recognized by either of these thinkers. How can we speak of interdependence between God and the world or even *relationship* in any ordinary meaning of the term? How can we speak of human responsibility for the creation? For it would seem that whatever human beings do is really God's action and not their

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<sup>7</sup> McFague's position, because she readily uses other images that imply a greater degree of otherness and transcendence (mother, lover, and friend) has a self-correcting feature built into her system.

own. Creaturely acts — including the eco-justice project — lose their moral significance. In terms of the pursuit of eco-justice, it seems to me, the pantheistic model does not give as much as it gives up. Other options should be explored.

## Two Preliminary Intuitions

Whitehead speaks of "religious intuitions" that human beings have in our moments of finest insight. They flow out of special, super normal experiences but have such elucidatory power that they come to order all other experiences.<sup>8</sup> In this paper I am led by two, perhaps competing, human intuitions about the relation of God and the world. The first has its origin in the experience of the wonder and beauty of creation. All that we see seems to declare that god is really *in* the world; that "earth's crammed with heaven and every common bush on fire with God."<sup>9</sup> The other intuition which arises — even in the middle of our wonderment — is the intuition that God is still "more than" all this. How may we make sense of both these intuitions?

Classical theism, it seems to me, errs in the direction of compromising the first intuition that God is "really *in* the world" and while pantheism errs in the direction of compromising the second, that God is "more than" the world. It is these two intuitions that have led me to seek to steer a course somewhere between classical theism which so sharply separates God from the world and pantheism which so completely identities God with the world.

## An Alternative Constructive Proposal

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<sup>8</sup> Religion claims that its concepts, though derived primarily from special experiences, are yet of universal validity, to be applied by faith to the ordering of all experience. Rational religion appeals to the direct intuition of special occasions, and to the elucidatory power of its concepts for all occasions. These intuitions derive from the super normal experience of human beings in their moments of finest insight (Whitehead, RM, p. 31).

<sup>9</sup> "Earth's crammed with heaven, And every common bush on fire with God; But only those who see take off their shoes... The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries, And daub their natural faces unawares..." (Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Aurora Leigh").

In the quest for a middle way I will be exploring forms of the panentheistic option, the view that "God is in all and all is in God", a view which allows for interdependence and interpenetration but not identity. To draw this out I will be making use of resources from process thinkers who have sought to say a "both-and" (in relation to the chart of metaphysical contraries) rather than an "either-or".

How do you say a "both-and" to what seem to be mutually exclusive attributes without making bald contradictions and speaking in oxymorons, "changing and unchanging", etc. The process approach applies the metaphysical contraries to different aspects of the divine life. God's Primordial Nature encompasses the traditional set of divine attributes and God's Consequent Nature encompasses the other set of attributes, that make relation to and interaction with the world possible. God is unchanging in God's self — God is always faithful. But the divine faithfulness is expressed in context-appropriate ways and therefore its concrete expressions change. Hartshorne defines panentheism as follows,

Panentheism is an appropriate term for the view that deity is in some real aspect distinguishable from and independent of any and all relative items, and yet, taken as an actual whole, includes all relative items (Hartshorne, DR, p. 89).

Panentheism is at least as far from pantheism as it is from classical theism (Hartshorne, DR, p. 89). It distinguishes itself utterly from both by its insistence that reality as such and God to an eminent degree are by their very natures social (Odgen, p. 127). The classical view on the one hand allows God and the world to be mutually exclusive spheres of the natural and the supernatural. A social relation between God and the world is thus hard to conceive. Pantheism, on the other hand, allows no "other" at all, for God and the world are one reality. There can be no social relation where there is no "other". A distinguishing feature of the process vision is the sociality/relativity principle.

As far as panentheism may be from either classical theism or pantheism it seems to me to convey very ably some of the more central and valuable concerns emphasized in these other visions of the God-world relation. Classical theism was concerned to make clear that God is the source of all. The world is good because God made it. Yet the world is not God. The goodness and integrity of creation is affirmed and idolatry is refused. It is these concerns of classical theism that lie behind the insistence that there is an "infinite qualitative distinction between God and the world." The intuition that *God is "more than" the world* is lifted up by this vision.

Pantheism has been concerned to articulate God's intimate, personal presence in and care for the world. God pervades the world and is manifest in all its parts. The view of God as an external deity outside of and over against the world who manipulates and controls it from outside is roundly rejected by the pantheistic option. God is the ground of potentiality, order, and value, who provides the initial aim for all temporal occasions. God creates by making all moments of experience possible and by luring their self-creativity toward the actualization of the good and the beautiful. God acts through persuasive power and the lure of beauty and value rather than through the coercive power of force. The divine involvement proposed is not a manipulation from outside in the old supernaturalistic, divine intervention mode which has become increasingly problematic with the development of modern science. This position also has the advantage of providing a way of speaking of God's involvement with *all* the world and not just with human beings. The intuition that *God is in the world* is lifted up by this vision. Panentheism agrees with and incorporates the central values of the other two alternatives while avoiding their respective pitfalls. (See appendix).

### **Conclusion**

The two intuitions that God is in the world and yet more than the world are well-articulated in this alternative vision and there are substantial implications in this for the eco-justice project. God

is in the world. God is present with and purposive and caring in relation to every creature. This affirmation does two things: It provides a model for our purposive caring for the creation grounded in God's own purposive caring. It also makes clear that what we do matters everlastingly (since the Superjective nature of every entity implies impact on all future actual occasions). Furthermore, since every moment of experience affects God and lives everlastingly in God, it matters all the more profoundly how we live in the world. There is a real sense in which *God's* future is bound up with the fate of the earth.<sup>10</sup> We are turned toward the world with renewed sense of the transcendent value of every creature. We gain a renewed sense of our responsibility for all creation's flourishing.

With regard to the second intuition, that God is "more than" the world, the panentheistic alternative retains both the transcendence of God and the integrity of creation. Thus God's activity is really God's and the world's is really the world's so that moral responsibility is not relinquished one the one hand and the problem of evil is not exacerbated on the other. We have a model for our own relation with the rest of nature in God's relation with the world.

As I close these comments I want to revert back to metaphors which might be illustrative of the kind of relation between God and the world which the panentheists envision. Many metaphors could be employed, and I maintain, along with McFague that many should be employed to avoid idolatry and since each metaphor has its own limits and liabilities as well as disclosive power.

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<sup>10</sup> Gustafson argues that a theocentric perspective places the fate of the earth and the human species as an important but not ultimate concern by virtue of its rejection of the anthropocentrism of modern Protestantism. If God is in internal relation, affected, and interdependent, then in a real sense, God's future is bound up with the fate of the earth.

One model of the panentheistic God-world relation might be the relation between a mother and a child in her womb. God's immanence is well conveyed in this intimate, life-giving relation. The world manifests a semi-autonomous unfolding as God provides the conditions of the possibility of its flourishing. God's transcendent relation is maintained — a pregnant woman has a life of her own beyond her life-giving activity. In this image connectedness is conveyed alongside — and not at the expense of — world integrity and divine transcendence. Each one in this model is a body/spirit though one of the partners is radically dependent on the other.

Another model which I find intriguing is one out of the writings of Augustine in the *Confessions*. Here God is envisioned as the wide sea and the whole of creation is imaged as a sponge floating in the sea. While Augustine seems to have used it to somewhat different purposes the image is also very useful in conveying both the integrity of the creation and the reality of the divine transcendent presence in it.

But Thee, O Lord, I imagined on every part environing and penetrating it, though every way infinite: as if there were a sea, everywhere and on every side, through unmeasured space, one only boundless sea, and it contained within it some sponge, huge, but bounded; that sponge must needs, in all its parts, be filled with that unmeasurable sea: so conceived I Thy creation, itself finite, full of Thee, the Infinite; and I said, Behold God, and behold what God hath created; and God is good, yea, most mightily and incomparably better than all these... (*Confessions*, VII.7, from Peacocke, p. 159).

There is no part of the sponge that is not filled with the immeasurable sea and yet the sponge is not the sea and the sea is not the sponge.

Our contemporary ecological crises makes it imperative that a new theology of nature be formulated. It seems to me that approaches which affirm that God is in the world but more than the world, allowing for both divine presence and divine

transcendence are the most religiously viable and the best able to guide a new theology of nature that will ground our struggle for eco-justice. I offer the proposal I put before you today with some enthusiasm. But also with some reserve, for I agree with Whitehead that in these matters, "The merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement is a display of sheer folly" (Whitehead, PR, xiv).

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### **Appendix - Whitehead's Contributions**

Whitehead's philosophy of organism is extremely helpful in offering a way to coherently articulate a vision of the God-world relation that says "both/and". It provides a way of speaking of God's relation to the world and even of the relation of mind and body in the human being in ways that refuse to break down into dualisms. The distinctions between Primordial and Consequent Nature are not mind-body distinctions, they are more like the distinctions between character and its expression, person and present state.

In Whitehead's philosophy of organism it is assumed that there are physical and mental poles present in varying degrees in all entities. This step is often misunderstood by those who do not realize Whitehead is working with a meaning for mentality that is not anthropocentrically defined. Mentality is simply the "ability to experience or interact". Even a rock may be said to have the experience of being thrown into a pond. This does not necessarily entail the consciousness or feeling of reflective capabilities that we find in the human being.

As Whitehead follows through on this insight the old subject-object separations dissolve. There can no longer be such a distance perceived between the human being and the rest of nature. We are on a continuum here and one in which (Whitehead, PR, 102 and AI, 207) there is not even an absolute gap between non-living and living bodies. The simplest forms of living things are not so vastly different from the most complex forms of non-living things (Hozinski, p. 188). This in itself holds out new possibilities for the eco-justice project in that it places mind and matter in a decidedly different relation and places the human being on a continuum with the rest of nature.

One could almost reappropriate the mind-body analogy so thoroughly (nondualistically) reconceived. Almost. Hartshorne does make use of the analogy of self is to body as God is to the world, but only in a very limited sense. Like Farrer he uses it as a

way to talk about God's knowledge of the world. God's knowledge of the world is immediate, sympathetic awareness like our own awareness of our own bodies (Hartshorne, in Cousins, p. 109).

In addition to making great advances on the old mind-body dualism, Whitehead's philosophy of organism is able to find ways of talking about internal rather than external relations between entities within the world and also between God and the world. One weakness of classical theism is that it assumed only external relations are possible. The actual world is made up of bits of matter or substance that then have external mechanical relations with each other. In a machine the parts themselves are truly independent; they do not need relations to other parts for their own existence. A machine can be disassembled without damage to the parts and then reassembled with the function restored, not so with organisms where the parts are fundamentally interdependent. Their relations to other parts are essential and cannot be severed without affecting them and the life of the whole organism. Organisms cannot be disassembled and reassembled (Hozinski, p. 34).

In Whitehead's philosophy of organism, "every item of the universe... is a constituent in the constitution of any one actual entity" (Whitehead, PR, p. 148). These internal relations are essential to what the entities are in themselves. Each entity is socially constituted, vitally connected with the others, yet having its own identity. So also with God and the world. They have their own identity and yet they are in a sense co-constitutive, mutually dependent, drawing completion from one another in reciprocal relation.

This is where people begin to get nervous, so let me explain what is being claimed here. Temporal actualities are made possible by God, by the eternal ground of order and value; and they gain final meaning, harmony, peace, and everlastingness from their inclusion and transformation in God. Hozinski summarizes this aspect of the God-world relation as follows,

God is the transcendent-immanent ground of all actuality and the final concreting union and harmony of all actuality. God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ever-developing end, the Creator and Redeemer of all creation.

But the eternal and everlasting God depends on the finite passing creature of the temporal world for actualized value. The growing actualization of God's eternal vision of possible beauty depends on how creatures exercise all possibilities (Hozinski, p. 274).

Needless to say this altered relation of interdependence between God and the world affects the sense in which God can be said to be creator of all that is. There is much less emphasis in process thought on *creatio ex nihilo* and much greater emphasis on *creatio continua*. As the ground of all possibility, God is a transcendent, wholly other. But God's immanence is evident in creation's "continuous inbuilt creativity" (Peacocke, p. 95). God's relation to the world is perennially and perpetually that of Creator (Haas, p. 164). Nature may even be thought of more as a *mode* of God's action rather than as a stage for God's action. In the actual process of nature God is involved; this is in fact a mode of God's self-expression and self-creation. Clearly this reframes all thinking about God's relation to nature and the status of nature as such.

I want to argue that despite the shift in emphasis, the theological affirmations at stake in *creatio ex nihilo* are not simply laid aside in this alternative vision of God's relation to the world. Behind the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* was a concern to reject a metaphysical dualism and the position that matter is preexistent and possibly evil. In this vision of the God-world relation there is no preexistent matter that is coeternal with God. Only God is eternal. There is no matter that exists prior to or apart from God's creative interaction with it. There is nothing which does not have God as its source. God is the ground of all possibility and the lure toward realization of all values. Prerogatives of necessity<sup>11</sup> and

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<sup>11</sup> It is important to distinguish here between the different senses in which the world is "necessary" for God in pantheism and

eternity of existence remain God's alone. John Cobb speaks of God as "the One who Calls us to what we might be" (Cobb, in Cousins, p. 126).

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panentheism respectively. Pantheism makes this world which now exists necessary for God since it is in fact God or God's own body. For panentheism, however, while God's own nature as a social being requires that there be some actual world, this particular world is not necessary for God. The fact that the essence of God is compatible with infinite possibilities of universes lends freedom to God on the one hand because God's personal character is not determined by the state of the universe, and lends freedom to the universe on the other because in its becoming it is not unduly restricted by God's character (Hartshorne, p. 89).

**SOMMAIRE**

***POUR UNE THÉOLOGIE  
DE LA NATURE:  
PREMIÈRES INTUITIONS***

La crise écologique actuelle fait en sorte qu'il devient pressant de formuler une nouvelle théologie de la nature. La tradition classique occidentale a été accusée d'avoir largement contribué à provoquer la situation difficile que l'on connaît présentement. Jusqu'à quel point cette tradition a-t-elle été étayée, avec son idéologie, des habitudes de pensée et d'action qui ne prenaient pas adéquatement en considération les conséquences écologiques qu'elles pouvaient avoir? Le défi lancé aux théologiens constitue au minimum une invitation pour qu'ils réexaminent leur interprétation des relations existant entre Dieu et le monde et pour qu'ils s'orientent vers une nouvelle théologie de la nature plus à même de fonder notre combat commun concernant le sort de la Terre.

Les façons d'exprimer les rapports existant entre Dieu et le monde qui proviennent du théisme classique présentent en effet une difficulté. Les perfections divines y ont été définies en opposition aux attributs du monde naturel, et comme étant supérieures à eux; et le surnaturel a été défini *en opposition* au naturel et comme étant *supérieur* à lui. Il semblerait donc que l'exclusion mutuelle ainsi que l'opposition entre le concept d'un Dieu nécessaire, éternel, immuable et absolu, et celui d'une nature contingente, liée au temps, changeante et relative, soient intrinsèques au système lui-même. Cette manière de voir fait en sorte qu'il devient difficile de rendre compte de façon plausible de la présence divine dans le monde ainsi que de son interaction avec lui. Les perfections divines qu'on a postulées évacuent dans les faits Dieu du monde naturel. Tout ceci rend concevables — et peut même encourager — l'exploitation et la violation de la Création que nous a laissées en héritage la tradition classique occidentale.

Quelques penseurs ont réagi contre cette façon d'exprimer les attributs de Dieu et du monde avec les difficultés qui en découlent. Ils ont ainsi cherché refuge dans le panthéisme et ont rejeté l'ensemble des attributs traditionnellement donnés à Dieu, lui appliquant l'ensemble des prédicats habituellement accordés au monde. On surmonte entièrement le problème de la séparation entre Dieu et le monde dès lors qu'on les identifie. Cet article porte un jugement critique sur de récentes propositions allant dans ce sens, dont *God's World/God's Body* de Grace Jantzen et *Models of God* de Sallie McFague.

L'auteure ouvre le débat en reconnaissant la contribution importante de ces approches dans les efforts qu'elles mettent à rattacher Dieu et le monde, et ceci d'une manière:

- 1) qui rejette le dualisme;
- 2) qui rejette les conceptions d'une activité de Dieu dans le monde basées sur un interventionnisme surnaturel;
- 3) qui affirme la réalité du monde physique et de l'incarnation comme tels;
- 4) qui disent clairement que Dieu se trouve «en danger» et qu'il est vulnérable relativement au monde;
- 5) et qui soulignent le fait que l'homme est incorporé au reste de la nature et qu'il a envers elle des responsabilités.

Elle montre ensuite que la conception qui prend forme ici peut comporter son propre ensemble de difficultés. Il existe un «double danger» dans le fait, d'une part, d'abandonner la transcendance divine de même que, d'autre part, l'altérité et l'intégrité de la Création. C'est ce dernier danger qui semble le moins souvent reconnu. Le théisme classique, qui insiste sur l'idée que Dieu n'est pas le monde et que le monde n'est pas Dieu, nous offre ici une intuition que nous ne devrions peut-être pas mettre de côté trop rapidement. En effet, comment pouvons-nous parler d'interdépendance entre Dieu et le monde, ou même de relation entre eux au sens courant du terme, s'il n'y a pas une quelconque altérité et une véritable intégrité de la Création? Comment pouvons-nous parler de la responsabilité de l'homme à l'égard de la

Création s'il n'éprouve pas un quelconque sentiment de son autonomie, de son altérité et de son intégrité? Car il semblerait alors que, quoique fasse l'homme, ce n'est pas lui mais Dieu qui agisse. Ce modèle de relations entre Dieu et le monde ne peut guère nous servir à établir un modèle de relations entre nous et le monde car on n'y suppose aucune relation véritable avec un autre véritable. Ces observations amènent l'auteure à douter que la conception panthéiste des rapports entre Dieu et le monde puisse nous montrer la direction la plus féconde et la plus éclairante dans le cadre de la crise actuelle.

Celle-ci, en terminant, fait une proposition qui se veut constructive, soit d'aller dans la direction d'une perspective panenthéiste qui se base elle-même sur une perspective féministe en cours d'élaboration. Le but de cette proposition est d'offrir une alternative qui concilierait mieux deux intuitions religieuses très répandues: soit que Dieu est vraiment *dans le monde* et que Dieu est *plus que le monde*. Il me semble que le théisme classique se trompe en tendant à aller à l'encontre de la première, tandis que la thèse panthéiste se trompe aussi en tendant à aller à l'encontre de la seconde. L'auteure évalue également cette proposition par rapport à sa capacité de fonder notre combat pour assurer l'avenir de la Terre.