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Review Of "The Body Of God: An Ecological Theology" By S. McFague

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McFague, Sallie. *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993. Pp. xiv + 274. \$13.00.

This important volume stands in the tradition of religious ecofeminism and continues the legacy of other works in this field, including Judith Plaskow's *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* and Rosemary Radford Ruether's *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*. *The Body of God* is a bellwether of the promise and tensions within progressive Christian thought. Throughout my reading of the book I posed to myself the question, can McFague negotiate successfully the contested ground that separates the classical theological heritage from the contemporary concerns of postmodern culture, or does her work finally sacrifice too much of traditional Christian doctrine in the interest of correlating religious belief with the cultural *Zeitgeist*?

McFague's central thesis is that theology for our time must first and foremost be able to account for the environmental crisis through a restructured understanding of God's relation to the world. As she did in her earlier volume, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age*, she argues that traditional theology has been dominated by a dualistic and monarchical model of God in which God was seen as both in control of, and unrelated to, the world in a manner similar to a medieval king's relationship to his feudal possessions. Since in the monarchical model God is not understood as intrinsically related to the world, it follows that the earth can be used—and sometimes abused—to serve human ends. McFague offers an organic or bodily understanding of God as a counterpoint to the regnant monarchical model. God is the "inspired body" or "embodied spirit" of the universe; as the radically immanent reality within which we "live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28), God is the "body of the universe."

The model of the world as God's body subjects God to fundamental loss, perhaps even destruction, in a manner that an extrinsic and hierarchical theology does not, because while "God is not reduced to the world, the metaphor of the world as God's body puts God 'at risk.' If we follow out the implications of the metaphor, we see that God becomes dependent through being bodily, in a way that a totally invisible, distant God would never be" (p. 72). On an initial reading of McFague's work, therefore, God appears to be fundamentally immanent to the world, but on a further reading, we find that God is not dependent on the world in the same way we are dependent on our bodies, in spite of what might appear to be the logical force of McFague's panentheistic model of God. "Everything that is is *in* God and God is *in* all things and yet God is not identical with the universe, for the universe is dependent on God in a way that God is not dependent on the universe" (p. 149). From my perspective, it is at this point that the reader is left with a

troubling equivocation on McFague's part: if the world *is* God's body, and if "being embodied" as opposed to simply "having a body" entails that an entity is fundamentally dependent on its body for its well-being, then in what sense is God *both* bodily and yet *not* dependent on God's body, the universe, for the divine life's health and maintenance? McFague wants to have it both ways. She wants to maintain both God's identity with and autonomy from the universe, God's body, without specifying the exact manner in which God both *is* and *is not* dependent on the earth.

In spite of this problem, my sense is that McFague's biocentric model of God, while it will be disturbing to some in the American Protestant mainstream, has the potential to strike a deep chord in persons, inside and outside the churches, who yearn for divine immanence, bodily wholeness, and social responsibility. But this model is not for everyone. For some it will purchase a coherent environmental theology at too steep a price, namely, the conventional understanding of God's sovereign nature as self-subsistent and independent from the fate of the earth. Be this as it may, *The Body of God* promises new directions for Christian environmental thought in a manner that is both theologically nuanced and culturally appropriate.

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Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Toward a Theology of Nature: Essays on Science and Faith*. Edited by Ted Peters. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993. Pp. x + 166. \$19.99.

The last decade has seen an explosion of publications in the ever-growing field of religion and science. Some of the work in this new discipline occurs on the edges of traditional religious thinking. But one author who has been determined to take it into the core of traditional Christian thought is German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg. In two earlier book-length publications (*Theology and the Philosophy of Science* and *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*), Pannenberg addressed the methodological issues of relating theology to science and the relationship between theology and the anthropological sciences. However, prior to the publication of this volume his reflections on the relationship between theology and the natural sciences, particularly physics and biology, could be found only in a number of scattered essays. These essays, written between 1970 and 1988, three of which have never before been published in English, have now been brought together in one volume, making them more accessible to the general reader.

Throughout these seven essays Pannenberg's primary concern is with our understanding of God's relationship to the world of nature. In the first three