

## IMAGES OF GOD WITHIN SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

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*[While respecting the freedom of expression inherent in Sally McFague's notion of "metaphorical theology," the author argues that the choice of a single governing image or set of interrelated images (e.g., the notion of God as a community of divine persons) is much more suitable for expansion into a systematic theology adequately representing the God-world relationship. At the same time, he recognizes that systematic theologies are only models or symbolic representations of a reality that is in itself humanly incomprehensible.]*

**I**MAGES OF God abound in Sacred Scripture. In the Hebrew Bible some images are impersonal. God is described, for example, as a "rock," a "shield" and a "fortress" in one of the Psalms (Psalm 144:1–2; see also Psalm 18:31–32). More often God is described in personal terms as a warrior (Exodus 15:3), a shepherd (Psalm 23), or vinekeeper (Isaiah 5:1–7), a solicitous father (Hosea 11:1) or mother (Isaiah 49:15), a passionate lover (Hosea 2:16). Likewise in the New Testament, Jesus uses many different images to describe the kingdom of God and indirectly therewith the personhood of God (e.g., Matthew 13: God as sower of seed, fisherman, pearl merchant, housewife). But, while there are thus multiple images to describe the infinite and thus strictly incomprehensible reality of God, relatively few of these images can be employed as the governing concept within a systematic theology purporting to describe the God-world relationship. For, as Alfred North Whitehead points out with respect to his own metaphysical scheme, "God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification."<sup>1</sup> Only a few images upon closer scrutiny can be thus incorporated into a metaphysical scheme as an exemplification of its basic principles.

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, Corrected Edition, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978) 343.

Here it might be objected that one is thereby limiting the infinite reality of God. God is rendered finite by being incorporated into a human metaphysical scheme. But the obvious rejoinder is that one is not dealing here directly with the reality of God but with the more limited concept of God which is operative within a given metaphysical scheme. The metaphysical scheme as a whole, to be sure, functions as a model or extended metaphor for the God-world relationship. As Ian Barbour notes with respect to the use of models in both theology and natural science, models “are neither literal pictures nor useful fictions but limited and inadequate ways of imagining what is not observable. They make tentative ontological claims that there are entities in the world something like those postulated in the models.”<sup>2</sup> Hence, provided that one respects the analogical character of the metaphysical system as a whole, one has every right to insist that the concept of God within the system be governed by the same metaphysical principles as every other concept within that system. Otherwise, the concept of God is not part of the system and the system is consciously or unconsciously atheistic; that is, it effectively prescind from the reality of God in working out a theoretical scheme simply for the understanding of the world. Furthermore, while this is a perfectly legitimate methodology for the use of models within natural science since scientists *ex professo* are seeking a naturalistic explanation of events within this world, it is definitely a paradoxical procedure for theologians who are supposed to be seeking a rational explanation of the God-world relationship.

One might once again object that I am thereby ruling out the possibility of an apophatic approach to the mystery of God. My response is that I am simply transferring the notion of analogical predication from individual concepts of God to entire systems of thought which purport to explain the God-world relationship. That is, whereas Thomas Aquinas was fully aware that any given concept of God was necessarily analogical,<sup>3</sup> he apparently did not realize that his entire scheme for the God-world relationship as expressed in the *Summa theologiae* was analogical; it represented just one human attempt to comprehend the God-world relationship in terms of a given set of metaphysical principles derived partly from Sacred Scripture and partly from the philosophical legacy of Plato and Aristotle. Presumably he did not appreciate the model-like character of his metaphysical scheme as a whole; hence, he felt obliged at the beginning of the *Summa theologiae* to exempt the reality of God from the constraints of his conceptual scheme. From the perspective of contemporary thinking in terms of models and metaphors, what he failed to recognize was that the world of creation also

<sup>2</sup> Ian G. Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997) 117.

<sup>3</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1, q. 12–13.

eluded full description in terms of his metaphysical scheme. Hence, all that he really achieved was an imperfect symbolic representation of the God-world relationship, something, as Barbour says, to be “taken seriously but not literally.”<sup>4</sup>

To illustrate my hypothesis here about the systematic employment of images of God within metaphysical schemes, I will first set forth in this article a brief analysis of Sallie McFague’s argument in her book *Models of God* that contemporary theology should employ multiple images of God (e.g., mother, lover, friend) so as to “remythologize” the classical God-world relationship.<sup>5</sup> While basically agreeing with her attempt to revitalize the classical understanding of the God-world relationship, I myself will argue that her case would be even more convincing if it were incorporated into a consistent metaphysical scheme for that same God-world relationship. There is some ambiguity, for example, whether McFague’s representations of God as mother, lover, and friend correspond sufficiently to the classical Christian understanding of God as triune. Above all, since McFague uses the analogy of the world as the “body” of God, one could easily infer that God is for her just one person with three distinct roles vis-à-vis human beings. In my own representation of God as a community of divine persons, however, as will be made clear below, I can incorporate her images of God as mother, lover, and friend into a communitarian understanding of the divine life and at the same time use that notion of God as a community of divine persons to exemplify a social ontology applicable to the world of creation. In this way, the attractiveness of these new images for the reality of God will be part of a much broader metaphysical scheme for understanding the God-world relationship.

In the preface to *Models of God*, McFague describes her style of theologizing as “metaphorical” or “heuristic”: “that is, it experiments with metaphors or models, and the claims that it makes are small.”<sup>6</sup> For, it is “mostly fiction,” even though “some fictions are better than others, both for human habitation and as expressions of the gospel of Christian faith at a particular time.”<sup>7</sup> Here I would prefer the term “symbolic representation” rather than “fiction” to emphasize the analogical character of a given metaphor or model. That is, while it evidently does not correspond to a picture or photograph of the reality in question, the model nevertheless makes an ontological claim, however tentative, about that same reality. Thus there are logical grounds for taking it seriously, even if not literally, as noted above. Moreover, as McFague herself points out, a model “is a

<sup>4</sup> Barbour, *Religion and Science* 117.

<sup>5</sup> Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) xi.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* xi–xii.

metaphor that has gained sufficient stability and scope so as to present a pattern for relatively comprehensive and coherent explanation.”<sup>8</sup> Hence, it stands midway between a simple image and a concept; it retains some of the concreteness of the image and at the same time like a concept is open to theoretical elaboration and refinement.

For somewhat the same reasons I also have reservations about McFague’s comment: “how language, any language, applies to God we do not know; what religious and theological language is at most is metaphorical forays attempting to express experiences of relating to God.”<sup>9</sup> While this clearly gives the theologian maximum freedom imaginatively to rethink classical images of God, nevertheless it carries a hidden danger. For, taken literally, this metaphorical approach to theology effectively confines the discipline to a phenomenology of religious experience which says nothing about God as the reality to which religious experience ultimately refers. As I see it, without claiming to have a definition or exact description of the divine being, one should be entitled to say that with a given model of God one is making an ontological claim, however tentative, about the reality of God even apart from human experience. In this respect, I side with Ian Barbour in his advocacy of critical realism as opposed to classical realism and instrumentalism.<sup>10</sup> That is, whereas classical realism assumes that models and theories are literal descriptions of extramental reality and whereas instrumentalism regards models simply as instruments for the correlation and prediction of observations within experience, critical realism “claims that there are entities in the world something like those postulated in the models.”<sup>11</sup> This is the methodology assumed by many natural scientists in their own use of models for what is otherwise unavailable to direct observation. Hence, a theologian should be entitled to make no less a claim in developing a model for the God-world relationship.

McFague quite rightly claims that systematic theology must be both historical and contemporary.<sup>12</sup> That is, it must first be faithful to the Christian Scriptures and the tradition of the Church, both of which testify to Jesus of Nazareth as God’s paradigmatic self-revelation to human beings. At the same time, systematic theology must be responsive to contemporary human issues and problems. For this reason, in her judgment, contemporary systematic theology should be modeled after the various forms of liberation theology which have arisen in the past half-century. “Each of these theologies, from the standpoint of race, gender, class, or another basic human distinction, claims that the Christian gospel is opposed to

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 34.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 39.

<sup>10</sup> Barbour, *Religion and Science* 117.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> McFague, *Models of God* 41.

oppression of some by others, opposed to hierarchies and dualisms, opposed to the domination of the weak by the powerful.”<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, what is needed today is “a destabilizing, inclusive, nonhierarchical vision of Christian faith, the claim that the Gospel of Christianity is a new creation for all of creation—a life of freedom and fulfillment for all.”<sup>14</sup>

In keeping with this line of thought, McFague rejects what she calls the “monarchical model” of the God-world relationship: “The *monarchical model* of God as King was developed systematically, both in Jewish thought (God as Lord and King of the universe), in medieval Christian thought (with its emphasis on divine omnipotence), and in the Reformation (especially in Calvin’s insistence on God’s sovereignty).”<sup>15</sup> She concedes that the monarchical model of the God-world relationship remains very popular even today because it communicates such a strong sense of stability and order, the comforting feeling to the believer that one’s personal salvation and the destiny of the world are in God’s hands. But in her judgment it has three major flaws: “in the monarchical model, God is distant from the world, relates only to the human world, and controls that world through domination and benevolence.”<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the model tends indirectly to reinforce negative human attitudes toward the non-human world. In implicit imitation of God, human beings treat Nature as an object of domination and control and do not respect the integrity of other living creatures.

As an alternative to the monarchical model of the God-world relationship, McFague offers the metaphor of the world as God’s body. She acknowledges, of course, the inevitable limitations of this line of thought. The world is literally not God’s body since God is not a physical entity like ourselves. But thinking of the world as if it were God’s body allows one to overcome the distance between God and the world which is imposed by the monarchical model of the God-world relationship. In fact, the danger within this model is that it seems to make God dependent on the world for God’s existence much as we humans are dependent upon our bodies for our existence.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, McFague proposes that this model for the God-world relationship be understood as a form of panentheism (as opposed to pantheism), namely, “a view of the God-world relationship in which all things have their origins in God and nothing exists outside of God, though this does not mean that God is reduced to these things.”<sup>18</sup> God is a personal agent apart from the world even though God is internally

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 46.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 48.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 63. Reference is to Ian Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms: A Comparative Study in Science and Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974) 156.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 65.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 72.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

related to everything in the world, but above all, to human beings as alternately Mother, Lover, and Friend.<sup>19</sup> Only in this way, as McFague sees it, can the God-world relationship be represented as “a destabilizing, inclusive, nonhierarchical vision of fulfillment for all of creation.”<sup>20</sup>

By way of critical response to McFague’s scheme, I would first of all endorse her proposal that the appropriate model for the God-world relationship should be some form of pantheism rather than the so-called monarchical model in which the transcendence of God to creation is so strongly emphasized. Admittedly, when she claims that within the monarchical model “the world is empty of God’s presence, for it is too lowly to be the royal abode,”<sup>21</sup> she is implicitly caricaturing the model of the God-world relationship developed by Thomas Aquinas and other classical theologians. For, Aquinas states very clearly that God is intimately present to the world in virtue both of God’s knowledge of what happens in the world and of God’s creative activity within the world.<sup>22</sup> But in my judgment she is correct in noting that the thrust of the image or metaphor is in the direction of the transcendence of God to the world rather than immanence within it.

Likewise, I think that she is correct in distancing herself from Gordon Kaufman’s representation of God as “the ‘hidden creativity’ or ‘unpredictable grace’ that works in and through the incredibly complex physical, biological, and historicocultural matrix that has resulted in our present situation.”<sup>23</sup> This is the logical opposite of an exaggerated transcendence of God to the world, namely, a virtual identification of the reality of God with the cosmic process.

Pantheism is a suitable middle-ground position between these two extremes since it affirms that everything finite must somehow be contained within the infinite reality of God and be sustained by the divine power of being even as it retains its own existence as a subsistent finite reality. The question, however, is whether the image of the world as the “body” of God adequately protects both the distinctive identity of the creature apart from God and the identity of God apart from the world. As McFague herself concedes, there are speculative problems with an overly literal understanding of this metaphor.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, if one’s model for a pantheistic understanding of the God-world relationship is based on the image of an all-embracing community or society in which the three divine persons of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity share their own communitarian life with each of

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 78–87.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 78.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 65.

<sup>22</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1, q. 8, a. 3.

<sup>23</sup> McFague, *Models of God* 80.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 69–78.

their creatures, then the above-mentioned limitations of the organismic model for the God-world relationship seem to be eliminated. For, where an organismic model inevitably implies the subordination of the parts or members to the organism as a whole, a societal model presupposes parts or members which retain their individual identity even as they together constitute something bigger than themselves as individuals, namely, the community or society to which they belong. Such a scheme may be properly called a social ontology. For, in giving co-equal status both to social totalities and to their constituent parts or members, it stands in opposition to Aristotelianism, Thomism and other classical systems of metaphysics in which individual "substance" is the first category of being.<sup>25</sup> For, within these latter metaphysical schemes, communities, environments or other social groupings are ontologically secondary or derivative realities by comparison with their individual parts or members.

The customary objection to the proposed communitarian model of the God-world relationship, of course, is that it is implicitly polytheistic; it fosters belief in multiple gods, not one God. On the other hand, if reality is intrinsically social, that is, if individual entities are invariably associated with one another as parts or members of different environmental systems or communities, then one can logically affirm the unity of the three divine persons of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity as the unity of a community without danger of polytheism or, more precisely, tritheism. For, God understood as a community of three divine persons is then the archetypal image of life in community, the primordial model for a social ontology in which literally everything that exists is part or member of some socially organized totality. Whether that totality be protons and electrons constituting the unity of an atom, different plant and animal organisms constituting the unity of a given environment, or human beings making up ever larger social groupings (families, local communities, nations, international organizations, etc.), in the end everything is socially organized. On all levels of creation, with individual entities intrinsically ordered to various forms of life in society or community, social totalities, not individuals as such, are the *imago Dei*, finite imitations of the communitarian life of the three divine persons.

To give this new image of the God-world relationship systematic rigor and comprehensiveness, however, there is need for its systematization in terms of a metaphysical scheme with an explicitly social orientation. Over the years I have found that the best such scheme is a somewhat revised understanding of the metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead. For, on the one hand, Whitehead affirms that "the final real things of which the world is made up" are actual occasions, namely, momentary self-constituting sub-

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1028a10–b7.

jects of experience.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, with his notion of “societies” as aggregates or nexuses of actual occasions with “social order,” that is, with a recurrent pattern of dynamic interrelationship,<sup>27</sup> he has at hand the necessary social counterpart to the actual occasion as the individual self-constituting subject of experience. All that is needed is further specification of what is meant by the notion of a “society.” For, Whitehead himself seems to waver on this key point, sometimes characterizing societies as mere aggregates of actual occasions and elsewhere clearly stating that societies are distinct realities which endure and undergo change even as actual occasions come and go.<sup>28</sup> My contention for many years now has been that Whiteheadian societies are best understood as structured fields of activity or patterned environments for their constituent actual occasions. Furthermore, as I shall indicate below, this field-oriented interpretation of Whiteheadian societies lends itself very nicely to a panentheistic understanding of the God-world relationship.

In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead has the following comments on societies as the necessary context or environment for their constituent actual occasions:

Every society must be considered with its background of a wider environment of actual entities, which also contribute their objectifications to which the members of the society must conform . . . But this means that the environment, together with the society in question, must form a larger society in respect to some more general characters than those defining the society from which we started. Thus we arrive at the principle that every society requires a social background, of which it is itself a part. In reference to any given society the world of actual entities is to be conceived as forming a background in layers of social order, the defining characteristics becoming wider and more general as we widen the background.<sup>29</sup>

The picture that thus emerges from Whitehead’s comments is that of a world constituted by hierarchically ordered environments or, as I would see it, structured fields of activity for a given set of actual occasions. The actual occasions are determined by the structure or pattern to be found in all the fields but, above all, in the field to which they immediately belong. Thus, while an actual occasion which is partly constitutive of a cell in the human body is structured primarily by the structure within the field proper to the cell, the same actual occasion is likewise shaped by its participation in the broader and more general fields of activity proper to the atomic and molecular levels of existence and activity throughout the world.

<sup>26</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality* 18.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 34.

<sup>28</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Free Press, 1967) 204.

<sup>29</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality* 90.

The actual occasion is not passively resident in the field but contributes the pattern effected by its own self-constituting “decision” to the ongoing structure of the field or fields to which it belongs. As Whitehead comments, a society (or, in terms of my theory, a structured field of activity) “is only efficient through its individual members. Thus in a society, the members can only exist by reason of the laws which dominate the society, and the laws only come into being by reason of the analogous characters of the members of the society.”<sup>30</sup> There is, accordingly, a reciprocal relation between actual occasions and the field or fields to which they belong. The fields with their already existing structure condition here and now the self-constituting activity of their member actual occasions, but the occasions in turn by those same self-constituting “decisions” from moment to moment can subtly alter the ongoing pattern or structure of the fields to which they belong.

Furthermore, given this field-oriented interpretation of Whiteheadian societies, one can affirm without contradiction the notion of panentheism. For, if the world of creation is constituted by an ascending hierarchy of ever more complex fields of activity for the actual occasions existing at any given moment within it, then creation itself as a vast network of subcommunities can be incorporated within the infinite field of activity proper to the three divine persons of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. In this way, individual actual occasions at every level of existence and activity within creation enjoy the freedom of self-constitution proper to their own mode of being and yet participate in this ascending hierarchy of societies culminating in the community of the three divine persons. Consistent with the Whiteheadian metaphysical scheme, the three divine persons are themselves to be understood as dynamically interrelated personally ordered societies of living actual occasions who thus co-constitute an all-embracing field of activity, or in Whiteheadian terms, a “structured society.”<sup>31</sup> They are, as noted above, one God rather than three gods in close collaboration because they are a single social reality in a world made up of hierarchically ordered social realities.

Sallie McFague in *Models of God* proposes, as I have already noted, that God may suitably be represented as Mother/Father, Lover, and Friend. While I applaud her efforts to engage images of God with strong appeal to human experience of interpersonal relations, I find her selection of these images still somewhat lacking in terms of a systematic approach to the God-world relationship. There is, for example, no indication of how the three divine persons of the Trinity relate to one another in terms of these

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 91.

<sup>31</sup> Bracken, *Society and Spirit: A Trinitarian Cosmology* (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1991) 123–39.

same roles. In the trinitarian theology of Thomas Aquinas, on the contrary, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are related first to one another in terms of the divine processions and only then are related to their creatures by way of the “missions” (understood as the temporal extension of those eternal processions).<sup>32</sup> Aquinas, in other words, has integrated his understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity into his systematic presentation of the God-world relationship in the *Summa theologiae*, at least to some extent. One could argue that in his exposition of the God-world relationship Aquinas works more with the classical notion of God as one, the omnipotent Creator of heaven and earth, than with God as triune. The different roles of the divine persons in the work of creation, redemption, and sanctification are not as carefully spelled out as perhaps they should be.<sup>33</sup> But, even with these limitations, Aquinas is still far more systematic in his thinking about the God-world relationship than McFague since, as I indicated earlier, her images of God as Mother/Father, Lover, and Friend really say nothing about God in terms of the divine persons and their relation to the world of creation, but only about our human relationship to God from a strictly phenomenological point of view.

As I have indicated at length elsewhere,<sup>34</sup> my own description of God as a community of divine persons involves a speculative reconstruction of the inner life of God as the basis for the relation of the divine persons to all their creatures, but, above all, to their human creatures. In brief, I have argued that the Father and Son of classical Christian belief are related to one another in an eternal I-Thou relationship which is continually mediated by the Holy Spirit as the Subsistent Principle of interpersonal communication or divine love. Imperfect as this representation of the internal relations of the divine persons to one another may be, it nevertheless makes clear how, on the one hand, they can indeed constitute a community of existence and activity among themselves. Each is indispensable for the ongoing existence of the divine communitarian life. But, on the other hand, this same model of the inner divine life legitimates the ascription of the roles of Mother/Father, Lover, and Friend to the divine persons in their relations to their creatures. The First Person of the Trinity is the originating principle of divine life within the Trinity and thus properly the originating principle of creation, the Father/Mother of all creatures. The Second Person of the Trinity as the eternal respondent to the Father/Mother within the Trinity is then readily identified as the incarnate Lover, the divine/

<sup>32</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1, qq. 27–43.

<sup>33</sup> See Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 99–102.

<sup>34</sup> Bracken, *Society and Spirit* 123–39. See also my recently published book *The One in the Many: A Contemporary Reconstruction of the God-World Relationship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

human Thou, for human beings in their aspirations toward a *bona fide* relationship with God. Finally, the Third Person of the Trinity as the mediator between the Father/Mother and Son/Daughter within the Trinity is likewise the invisible mediator or divine Friend present to the human being in her or his struggle to draw closer to God. Thus the understanding of God as a community of divine persons is integral to the understanding of the God-world relationship in a way which is not possible for McFague in her simple representation of God as Mother/Father, Lover, and Friend to human beings.

Even more important for her consistent advocacy of the notion of panentheism for the God-world relationship, however, is my revision of Whitehead's metaphysical conceptuality to allow for a field-oriented understanding of the God-world relationship. The organismic analogy for the God-world relationship is fraught with difficulties, as McFague herself admits, since organisms are usually regarded as substances which mutually exclude one another. Thus God and the world must equivalently be regarded as one substance, one composite reality, since to treat them as separate substances would be to fall back into ontological dualism. Fields or environments, however, as Whitehead makes clear, can be "layered" within one another without loss of ontological independence for the lower-level fields and their constituent actual occasions. Each field, in other words, represents a distinct level of existence and activity with laws governing the interrelated activity of its constituent actual occasions. In this sense, lower-level fields of activity provide the infrastructure for the existence and activity of higher-level fields while the higher-level fields of activity with their more specialized modes of operation condition the activity of actual occasions within the lower-level fields of activity.<sup>35</sup> One can then without fear of pantheism affirm the notion of panentheism as a suitable contemporary model for the God-world relationship.

To sum up, then, I have tried to make clear how one has to evaluate very carefully the many images of God which can be culled from the Bible and Christian spiritual literature through the ages in order to settle on that single governing image or set of interrelated images which will be suitable for incorporation into a systematic theology as a fully coherent representation of the God-world relationship. Many images, otherwise very attractive for arousing a prayerful response on the part of the believer, are simply not capable of precise logical articulation in terms of a metaphysical system. This is not to dismiss, of course, the obvious merits of Sallie McFague's "metaphorical" approach to the God-world relationship. One is thereby free to rethink that relationship from a variety of new and different

<sup>35</sup> See my article "Supervenience and Basic Christian Beliefs," *Zygon* 36 (2001) 143–46.

angles. Moreover, systematic theology can easily become counter-productive if its limits as an extended metaphor or symbolic representation of the God-world relationship are not recognized. Yet, as McFague herself concedes, some symbols are inevitably better than others, and the reasons for one's choice of a given set of symbols to describe the reality of God and the world eventually have to be worked out and evaluated. Hence, systematic thinking in theology, while it may not have the last word in the ongoing conversation about models of God, nevertheless plays a very important role in preserving the integrity of theology as a reputable academic discipline in contemporary society. The present article was written to defend and uphold the traditional status of theology as a strong appeal to reason as well as an expression of personal belief.