

## A PROCREATIVE PARADIGM OF THE CREATIVE SUFFERING OF THE TRIUNE GOD: IMPLICATIONS OF ARTHUR PEACOCKE'S EVOLUTIONARY THEOLOGY

GLORIA L. SCHAAB

*The question of right speech about the mystery of God in suffering has moved many to discuss theodicy and human freedom, and has persuaded many others to rethink the understanding of God in relation to the world itself. The article focuses on two key concepts in Arthur Peacocke's evolutionary theology to propose a new understanding of the creative suffering of the triune God. It considers this proposal in three particular contexts: feminist theology, ecological praxis, and pastoral ministry.*

IN HIS EXPLORATION of the influence of evolutionary science on Christian theology, Arthur Peacocke, Anglican theologian and biochemist, divides his evolutionary insights concerning creation into cosmic “being” or “what there is” in the cosmos, and cosmic “becoming” or “what is going on” in the cosmos. According to Peacocke, this distinction between cosmic being and becoming impels theologians “to reckon with their one God’s relation to a continuously developing world,” which implies “a continuously changing relation of God to the world . . . and to the further possibility that God is not unchanging in certain respects.”<sup>1</sup> To demonstrate this possibility, he applies the distinction between cosmic being and becoming analogously to distinctions in the nature and attributes of God. He proposes that one consider God not solely in terms of being (defined by

GLORIA L. SCHAAB, S.S.J., holds a Ph.D. in systematic theology from Fordham University. Currently assistant professor of systematics and director of the master’s program in practical theology at Barry University, Miami Shores, Fla., she has published extensively on the theology of God, Christology, feminist theology, evolutionary theology, and contextual theology. Among her recent publications are: “The Power of Divine Presence: Toward a *Shekhinah* Christology,” in *Christology: Memory, Inquiry, Practice*, ed. Anne Clifford and Anthony Godzieba (Orbis, 2003); “Of Models and Metaphors: The Trinitarian Constructions of Sallie McFague and Elizabeth A. Johnson,” *Theoforum* (2002). Forthcoming in *Theoforum* is “Christic Servanthood: A Transformative Model of Eucharistic Spirituality and Devotion.” Several manuscripts are under review for publication, including the monograph *In, With, and Under: The Creative Suffering of the Triune God*.

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming—Natural, Divine, and Human*, exp. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 100–101.

Peacocke as who God is in Godself) but also in terms of becoming (defined by Peacocke as how God expresses the divine purposes in the cosmos).

Employing the scientific methodology of inference-to-the-best explanation,<sup>2</sup> Peacocke focuses on “what is there” in the being of the cosmos to unfold his understanding of the being of God. Based on scientific observations of cosmic being as contingent and dependent for its existence on a being beyond its own finitude, Peacocke infers that God in Divine Being is the transcendent Ground of the entities, structures, and processes intrinsic to the finite universe. These contingent realities display both a remarkable unity and a fecund diversity; therefore, the source of such unity and diversity must be both essentially one and yet unfathomably rich. Further observation of these realities discloses their inherent order and regularity, which demonstrates the supreme rationality that must underlie such cosmic properties. Moreover, the persistence of such order in the midst of a universe that changes with the passage of time implies that God acts not only as Creator, but also as Sustainer and faithful Preserver of the cosmos throughout the passage of time. Within this order and regularity throughout the passage of time, however, scientists have observed a remarkable dynamism through which new entities and structures appear. Because of this ongoing creativity, Peacocke infers that God may not only be conceived as Creator of the cosmos at its origin, but also as its continuous Creator. Such continuous creativity in the cosmos leads to the remarkable observation that from the very stuff and the very processes of the cosmos has emerged the human person, an entity of unparalleled complexity, consciousness, subjectivity, and freedom. On the basis of this observation, Peacocke infers that God, the Source of such a personal being, must be at least personal or supra-personal in nature and, on analogy with created personal beings, must have and express divine purposes through self-revelatory creative acts.

Shifting focus to “what is going on” in cosmic becoming, Peacocke enters into his discussion of God in Divine Becoming. Scientific observations concerning the kaleidoscopic fecundity of the cosmos suggest to Peacocke that God in Divine Becoming is a God who takes joy and delight in the pluriformity of creation, a pluriformity that results not only from the order and regularity, but also from the operation of chance occurrences within such regularity. Since Peacocke has already argued that God is continuous Creator, the inherent dynamism of the cosmos in its the evolutionary pattern of natural selection and the indeterminacy of events at the quantum level leads Peacocke to infer that God is not only the Source of the regularity of law, but also the Source of the operation of chance in the cosmos. However, science insists that the operation of chance within law is in

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 87–91.

principle unpredictable and uncontrollable. Therefore, Peacocke concludes, God cannot be considered unconditionally omnipotent and omniscient; rather, God must be conceived as self-limited in knowledge and power. From this self-limitation, Peacocke further infers that God-in-Becoming must be also be a vulnerable God who is self-emptying and self-giving in love, a God who is familiar with suffering and who bears cosmic grief. This is not a God who dwells in undisturbed eternal bliss, but a God who embraces and permeates the cosmos, suffering its pain and death in, with, and under its costly unfolding in time. Based on this understanding, Peacocke ultimately proposes the concept of the creative suffering of the triune God in the midst of the travail of the cosmos, a concept, Peacocke claims, most aptly expressed through female procreative metaphors.<sup>3</sup>

Peacocke's proposal of the creative suffering of the triune God in terms of female procreativity has intriguing possibilities for theological reflection and discourse. But participating in such reflection and discourse necessitates an accurate understanding of the nature and status of language as used in the theological and the scientific disciplines. Theologically and scientifically, one cannot speak naïvely as if a one-to-one correspondence existed between the meaning of one's words and the realities to which they refer. However, neither can one speak instrumentally as if one's words were simply useful fictions bearing no intrinsic connection to their referent. Concerning both finite reality in science and infinite reality in theology, therefore, one must speak critically and somewhat skeptically, to use Peacocke's terms. In employing certain concepts or models, the theologian and the scientist strive to signify as accurately as possible something akin to the entity to which each concept or model refers. Beyond this attempt at accuracy, however, each discipline must accept that finite speech will ultimately fail to adequately express the mysteries of creation and its Creator. Thus, the theologian and the scientist must employ imagistic language, analogy, models, and metaphors to begin to fathom the incomprehensible and to articulate the inexpressible. In employing such imagistic language, the affirmations of theology and science concerning the cosmos and its Creator are necessarily and unavoidably informed and constrained by the spatial, temporal, and material constructs of finite experience. And so it is with the affirmations to be set forth here. Nevertheless, the constraints of language do not call for apophatic silence. Rather, they call for kataphatic humility born from the realization that, although the finite reality and infinite reality of which theology and science speak are essentially mysteries, they are, nonetheless, continually self-communicating and infinitely knowable.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 87–134.

Within this understanding of theological language and appropriating a panentheistic paradigm as recommended by Peacocke, I will focus on two key concepts in Peacocke's evolutionary theology through which he conceives the suffering of God: the ubiquity of suffering and death in the cosmos and the triunity of God in panentheistic relationship to the cosmos. I do so to examine and expand their implications in three particular contexts: feminist theology, ecological praxis, and pastoral ministry. Within the feminist theological context, I highlight Peacocke's contention that the most appropriate imagery through which to articulate the creative suffering of God is that of the female procreative experience. I propose a model of the creative suffering of the triune God in terms of three female images for God drawn from the Jewish and Christian traditions. The first is *She Who Is*, the Matrix of all being, based on Elizabeth Johnson's reading of Thomas Aquinas. The second is *Shekhinah*, the indwelling hypostasization of God with the poor and the suffering of Israel, based on the kabbalist tradition of Judaism. The third is *Sophia*, the pervasive spirit of divine Wisdom that permeates and impels creation toward fullness of life, based on the sapiential tradition of the Hebrew Scriptures. This female procreative paradigm in turn gives rise to an appropriate model for ecological praxis in an evolving cosmos, that of midwifery. Finally, I follow Peacocke's articulation of a trinitarian differentiation in divine creativity and conjecture that a similar differentiation might be made with regard to divine suffering. I propose that the suffering of God in relation to the cosmos may be understood in terms of transcendent sympathy, incarnate empathy, and immanent protopathy and support this proposal by outlining the pastoral efficacy of such a differentiation. An evaluation follows immediately upon each of the three proposals, using four criteria: fit with the data of Peacocke's evolutionary theology, simplicity, fecundity, and pastoral efficacy. I then conclude with remarks concerning the effect of these proposals on theological discourse and praxis.

## KEY CONCEPTS

### Suffering and Death in an Evolutionary Cosmos

Because of the divine choice to create the cosmos in the ways observed and described by science, conditions inherent in the cosmos produce ubiquitous suffering and death. In the self-creativity of the cosmos through the interplay of chance and law, the cosmos exhibits not only the emergence of new life forms, but also the inevitably costly process of natural selection. Its self-creativity produces not only kaleidoscopic fecundity, but also the calamitous events of pain and suffering. It fosters not only experiences of joy and well-being, but also events of destruction and extinction of cosmic life

forms. Ultimately, this self-creativity through chance and law results in the emergence of free persons who “are not the mere ‘plaything of the gods,’ or of God,” but who share “as co-creating creatures in the suffering of God engaged in the self-offered, costly process of bringing forth the new.”<sup>4</sup> However, in bringing forth such beings, a new dimension of suffering appears that is not a necessary concomitant of evolution through free process but is a contingent consequence of the exercise of human free will. Hence, in risking the instantiation of *homo sapiens*, God risks and suffers effects that are unfavorable to countless cosmic organisms. However, Peacocke contends, such effects are unavoidable. For, if it is God who wills into existence living creatures that depend on the same factors that produce “natural evils,” then “even God cannot have one without the other.”<sup>5</sup>

In view of this suffering and death in the cosmos, Peacocke contends, “for any concept of God to be morally acceptable and coherent . . . we can not but tentatively propose that God suffers in, with, and under the creative processes of the world with their costly unfolding in time.”<sup>6</sup> Peacocke understands this suffering of God as “an identification with, and participation in, the suffering of the world” as it struggles to push beyond suffering to new and transformed life. Moreover, this suffering creativity of God reminds Peacocke of the Pauline vision of creation in the pangs of giving birth, a “creation that waits with eager longing . . . groaning in labour pains until now” (Rom 8:19–22). The image of labor pains leads him to suggest that the most appropriate expression of such divine suffering toward new life is found in the travail of female procreativity, specifically expressed in terms of a panentheistic model of God-world relationship. Since, in the classical theistic conception, God exists “spatially” separate from the world, “there is an implied detachment from the world in its suffering.” However, when the relationship between God and the cosmos is conceived panentheistically, there is no such detachment. The sufferings of the world become internal to Godself in an intimate and actual way. Moreover, “God in taking the suffering into God’s own self can thereby transform it into what is whole and healthy—that is, be the means of ‘salvation’ when this is given its root etymological meaning.”<sup>7</sup> Hence, in Peacocke’s understanding, divine suffering is not passive, but “active with creative intention . . . [as] God brings about new creation through suffer-

<sup>4</sup> Arthur Peacocke, “The Cost of New Life,” in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) 37.

<sup>5</sup> Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age* 126.

<sup>6</sup> Peacocke, “The Cost of New Life” 37.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Peacocke, “Articulating God’s Presence in and to the World Unveiled by the Sciences,” in *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God’s Presence in a Scientific World*, ed. Philip Clayton and Arthur Peacocke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 151–52.

ing.”<sup>8</sup> Surely, Peacocke concedes, not even the understanding of the genesis and inevitability of pain, suffering, and death in a free cosmos, “can diminish our sense of loss and tragedy as we experience or witness particular . . . evils, especially in individuals known to us.”<sup>9</sup> However, when considered within the unfolding of cosmic history, the ubiquity of suffering and death in the cosmos is ultimately transformed by the creative impetus of the triune God, bringing life and liberation out of death and destruction through evolutionary processes.

### The Triune God in Relationship to the Cosmos

Throughout Peacocke's writings, the transcendent, immanent, and incarnate creativity and relationality of God have been held together in a variety of ways by the Christian concept of the trinity of God.<sup>10</sup> In his earliest works, Peacocke expressed this notion in explicitly traditional categories, maintaining “God the Father is believed in as ‘Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible’; God the Son as he ‘by whom all things were made’; and God the Holy Spirit as ‘the Lord, the Giver of life.’”<sup>11</sup> In subsequent writings, Peacocke explored alternative theological models to maintain a balanced understanding of God as transcendent, immanent, and incarnate, including that of the Logos as the expression of God in creative and ordering activity, the Wisdom (*Sophia*) of God active at the creation of the world and immanent in the cosmos and in humanity, the Spirit of God active towards and in creation, and, ultimately, the model of panentheism.<sup>12</sup> For Peacocke, the panentheistic paradigm effectively integrates into one cohesive model the evolutionary and quantum insights disclosed through the sciences and the Christian concept of the trinity of God as transcendent, incarnate, and immanent.

Peacocke's selection of the panentheistic model of God-world relationship results from what he perceives as the inadequacy of Western classical theism in conceptualizing the Creator God of Christianity in transcendent, incarnate, and immanent relation to the cosmos. According to Peacocke, this inadequacy stems in part from the tendency of Western theism to emphasize the ontological distinction between the Creator and creation in terms of discrete “substances.” Because of the ontological impossibility of

<sup>8</sup> Arthur Peacocke, *Paths from Science towards God: The End of All our Exploring* (PSG) (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001) 88.

<sup>9</sup> Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age* 126.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979) 206.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur Peacocke, *Science and the Christian Experiment* (London: Oxford University, 1971) 120.

<sup>12</sup> Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science* 204–7, at 207.

the interpenetration of different substances, the created realm was conceived as “outside” of God, and thus God’s ongoing influence on creation could be conceived only in terms of interventions from outside the world.

Peacocke’s insight concerning substance ontology finds echoes in theologians such as Walter Kasper, Catherine LaCugna, and Denis Edwards. According to Kasper, “the ultimate and highest reality is not substance but relation.”<sup>13</sup> Denis Edwards has written similarly, maintaining that “reality . . . is more a network of relationships than a world of substances.”<sup>14</sup> Catherine LaCugna cites the ontological traditions of Greek and Latin theology to assert: “*personhood is the meaning of being*. To define what something is, we must ask who it is or how it is related. . . . We need now to specify the ontology appropriate to this insight, namely an ontology of relation or communion.”<sup>15</sup> Hence, a critical element in appropriating the panentheistic model is to make the move away from “substance” ontology to “personal” or “relational” ontology. As described by LaCugna, “A relational ontology understands both God and the creature to exist and meet as persons in communion. . . . The meaning of to-be is to-be-a-person-in-communion. . . . God’s To-Be is To-Be-in-relationship, and God’s being-in-relationship-to-us is what God is. A relational ontology focuses on personhood, relationship, and communion as the modality of all existence.”<sup>16</sup>

While this move has been deemed theologically viable for its effectiveness in demonstrating intimate and efficacious relationships between and within God and the Christian community, for Peacocke it is effective in countering the critique by Christian theology that, in the panentheistic model, there is no distinction between God and creation. Such a lack of distinction would mean either that God is pantheistically identified with creation or that creation is incorporated into the divine.<sup>17</sup> However, if one asserts that the ontological distinction between the Creator and created is best conceived as “personal” or “relational,” then one must conclude to a distinction of “subjects” rather than “substances.” Hence, Peacocke can maintain the intimate, internal, and interpenetrating relationship between God and creation while still upholding both the ontological distinction

<sup>13</sup> Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM, 1983) 156.

<sup>14</sup> Denis Edwards, “The Discovery of Chaos and the Retrieval of the Trinity,” in *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, ed. Robert J. Russell, Nancy Murphy, and Arthur Peacocke (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Foundation, 1995) 60.

<sup>15</sup> Catherine M. LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991) 248–49.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 250.

<sup>17</sup> John Polkinghorne, *Science and the Trinity: The Christian Encounter with Reality* (New Haven: Yale University, 2004) 95.

between Creator and created “subjects” and the balance of the transcendent, incarnate, and immanent “subjects” of the triune God.

Peacocke’s imagery of intimacy, internality, and interpenetration in the creative process suggests to him that the language of human procreation might offer a viable means by which to talk about God as transcendent, incarnate, and immanent Creator. However, search as he might among traditional theological images of God-world relationship—images that predominately reflect a patriarchal imagination and symbol-system—Peacocke was not able to find a model that adequately communicated the understanding of the interpenetration of God in the cosmos and the cosmos within God in ontologically distinctive, yet internal ways. According to Peacocke, traditional Western models of God’s creative activity place “too much stress on the externality of the process—God . . . regarded as creating rather in the way the male fertilises the female from outside.” In response to this theological difficulty, Peacocke argues that a “more fruitful” model derives from the female procreative process, and, thus, from female imagery: “mammalian females nurture new life within themselves and this provides a much needed corrective to the purely masculine image of divine creation. God, according to pantheism, creates a world other than God-self and ‘within herself’ (we find ourselves saying for the most appropriate image)—yet another reminder of the need to escape from the limitations of male-dominated language about God.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Peacocke’s proposal of the pantheistic-procreative paradigm proves not only to be an especially apt way of modeling the God-world relationship in which the world is conceived “as being given existence by God in the very ‘womb of God,’” but also of “evoking an insight into the suffering of God in the very processes of creation. God is creating the world from within and, the world being ‘in’ God, God experiences its sufferings directly as God’s own and not from the outside.”<sup>19</sup> Hence, Peacocke contends, integrating the understanding of the triune God as suffering into this procreative paradigm “gives an enhanced significance to this feminine pantheistic model.”<sup>20</sup> This insight, pregnant with possibilities, guides the unfolding of this article.

## FEMINIST, ECOLOGICAL, AND PASTORAL POSSIBILITIES

### Feminist Theology: A Pantheistic-Procreative Proposal

In view of Peacocke’s insights concerning a female pantheistic-procreative paradigm of the suffering of God as triune, I identify three

<sup>18</sup> Peacocke, *Paths from Science* 139.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 142.

<sup>20</sup> Peacocke, “The Cost of New Life” 38.

female images of God drawn from the theological, mystical, and biblical traditions of Christianity and Judaism to develop my proposals: the theological appellation She Who Is, the mystical manifestation *Shekhinah*, and the biblical personification *Sophia*. Each image corresponds to one of Peacocke's trinitarian relations, each has an integral relation to the others, and each resonates with the timbre of divine suffering in response to cosmic travail.

### She Who Is—Divine Suffering with the Cosmos

In her influential work, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, Elizabeth Johnson states that the appellation, "SHE WHO IS can be spoken as a robust, appropriate name for God. With this name we bring to bear in a female metaphor all the power carried in the ontological symbol of absolute, relational livingness that energizes the world."<sup>21</sup> Johnson grounds this statement in two interrelated elements of the Jewish and Christian traditions. The first is the Hebrew designation of God as YHWH, biblically translated "I AM WHO AM," the God of the burning bush, of holy ground, of Moses and the Israelite people. While Johnson acknowledges the range of exegetical difficulties that surround the interpretation of this appellation, she contends, "Of all the interpretations of the name given at the burning bush . . . the one with the strongest impact on subsequent theological tradition links the name with the metaphysical notion of being. YHWH means 'I am who I am' or simply 'I am' in a sense that identifies divine mystery with being itself."<sup>22</sup> The second is the related Thomistic proposal that, since the very essence and existence of God is Being itself, the most appropriate name for God is HE WHO IS. Noting, however, that the original Latin reads "*qui est*," translatable as "who is" or "the one who is," Johnson contends, "In English the 'who' of *qui est* is open to inclusive interpretation. . . . If God is not intrinsically male, if women are truly created in the image of God, if being female is an excellence, if what makes women exist as women in all difference is participation in divine being, then there is a cogent reason to name toward . . . God, 'the one who is,' with implicit reference to an antecedent of the grammatically and symbolically feminine gender."<sup>23</sup>

In Johnson's formulation, the image of God as She Who Is signifies in female terms the God who is "pure aliveness in relation, the unoriginate welling up of fullness of life in which the whole universe participates."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1993) 242–43.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 241.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 242.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 240.

This signification clearly echoes Peacocke's own expression of the divine being of God as transcendent source of cosmic life. In terms of Peacocke's panentheistic-procreative model, the Creator She Who Is mothers all creation. She envelops in her womb its entities: stars and planets, earth and sky, creatures of the land and sea, all races of humanity; its structures: subatomic and atomic, molecular and organic, communal and societal, global and universal; and its processes: natural selection and evolutionary emergence, regularities of law and randomness of chance, quantum indeterminacy and special relativity. "All is created through her; all is created for her. In her everything continues in being" (Col 1:16-17, adapted).

As evolutionary processes demonstrate, however, the being and the becoming of all things in the cosmos is inevitably attended by suffering and death in the movement toward emergent existence. The cosmic child of this Mother's womb endures these pangs of suffering and death that life may be birthed anew. In response, the transcendent Mother of the universe inherently senses and intimately suffers the least bit of distress that afflicts the growing life within her. Moreover, the transcendent Mother has a suffering distinctively her own. While "the pain of childbirth . . . is accompanied by a powerful sense of creativity and . . . joy," it is nonetheless a creative suffering unlike any other.<sup>25</sup> In the process of pregnancy, the transcendent Mother bears the unimaginable weight of a cosmos laden with inherent and inflicted pain and death. She is sickened morning and evening by the violence, oppression, and exploitation that ravages the developing life within her, the offspring of her love. In the labor of birthing, she cries out, gasping and panting, unable to restrain herself (Isa 42:14). As Johnson explains, "The loud birthing cries evoke a God who is in hard labor, sweating, pushing with all her might to bring forth . . . the fruit of her love."<sup>26</sup> Moreover, this labor is for all created time, for the birth of the cosmos in its fullness is an eschatological event to be completed only in the new creation in which all weeping and suffering and death will be no more. Until that time, the transcendent Mother of the panentheistic-procreative paradigm suffers with the cosmos and its processes, enduring the passion of the process of bringing forth new life. In divine being and creativity, the transcendent Mother God is both "God as abyss of livingness . . . the matrix of all that exists, mother and fashioner of all things . . . absolute holy mystery of love"<sup>27</sup> and God as cosmos-bearer, suffering and laboring, expanding and contracting, gasping and panting, stretching and straining, pushing and burning with love-driven passion for the life of the world.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 254.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 214.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 255.

### *Shekhinah*—Divine Suffering in the Cosmos

According to Gershom Scholem, “The *Shekhinah* . . . is a concept that has intimately accompanied the Jewish people for some two thousand years, through all phases of its turbulent and tragic existence . . . itself undergoing manifold developments and transformations.”<sup>28</sup> The term *Shekhinah* is derived from the Hebrew *shakan*, meaning presence or act of dwelling, and is expressed as a feminine-gendered substantive. In the Hebrew tradition, it was used to refer to an aspect of the deity perceived by humanity and appears in the Talmud, in *midrashim*, and in mystical kabbalah. While Hebrew interpretations of *Shekhinah* differ over time, she is recognized as existent within the Godhead, within creation as a whole, and with suffering in particular. Reflecting one of Peacocke’s own understandings, commentators in the Hebrew tradition observe that awareness of *Shekhinah* arose as a consequence of the attempt to reconcile the duality of God’s transcendent and immanent presence in relation to the world.<sup>29</sup> While philosophers debated the relationship of the transcendence and immanence of the Divine, the witness of the people of Israel testified that this existence of God in the world was experienced not only as presence, but as intimacy and immediacy as well. In rabbinic literature, *Shekhinah* was both an appellation interchangeable with God and a quality or possession of the Deity, given to the world solely because of Israel.<sup>30</sup> Shortly before the appearance of Christianity, *Shekhinah* began to develop as an independent entity and her spiritual presence took substance. She could be localized and her movements discernible. She speaks and acts, sings with joy and cries with grief, admonishes and encourages, becomes angry and appeased. She is considered to have an opinion, a mind, a will, and a personality. Thus, *Shekhinah* develops into a mediator between humanity and God, heaven and earth. Through her, God enters the world and she is the medium through which God is accessible to human beings.<sup>31</sup>

Countless tracts from the rabbinic and kabbalist traditions affirm that *Shekhinah* shares the joys and the affliction of both the community and the individual person of Israel to the extent that the Divine feels the pain of the human. “When a human being suffers, what does the *Shekhinah* say? ‘My

<sup>28</sup> Gershom Scholem, “Readings from *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts*,” <http://dhushara.tripod.com> (accessed on December 1, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1987) 38.

<sup>30</sup> J. Abelson, *The Immanence of God in Rabbinical Literature* (New York: Hermon, 1969) 122.

<sup>31</sup> See Gloria L. Schaab, “The Power of Divine Presence: Toward a *Shekhinah* Christology,” in *Christology: Memory, Inquiry, Practice: Proceedings of the College Theology Society 2002*, ed. Anne Clifford and Anthony Godzieba (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003) 92–115.

head is too heavy for me; my arm is too heavy for me.' And if God is so grieved over the blood of the wicked that is shed, how much more so over the blood of the righteous?"<sup>32</sup> As the wounded one, *Shekhinah* not only weeps for the suffering of her people, crying out when someone undergoes punishment, but also suffers their persecutions with them. In Jesus, the firstborn of all creation, *Shekhinah*, the cosmic offspring of She Who Is, suffers intimately with and in the same manner as those who bear the sufferings of the cosmos. A comparison of their activities in their respective traditions indicates that both Jesus and *Shekhinah* participate as co-sufferers with God's people. As God incarnate, both Jesus and *Shekhinah* manifest and involve the Divine in the life of the cosmos and its creatures with intimacy and immediacy. In their indwelling among and advocacy for those on the margins of society, both Jesus and *Shekhinah* embrace and enter into the fate of the afflicted, experiencing their suffering and groaning with their anguish.

Clearly, the conception of *Shekhinah* as God incarnate provides a means to envision the Divine within the history of a suffering cosmos. Incarnate in the ministry of Jesus the Christ, *Shekhinah* reveals herself as intimately involved in the suffering of the world. However, both traditions also testify to the liberating action of God incarnate on behalf of the suffering and the oppressed. As the redemption of *Shekhinah* and the resurrection of Jesus symbolize, suffering and death can be transformed through the vivifying and liberating presence and power of the God of Jesus and of *Shekhinah*. While God's self-limited power may not prevent all manner of evil endured by these incarnate ones, neither is it overcome by evil. Rather, *Shekhinah* and the Christ of God move through suffering and death toward life, liberation, and transformation. This is the good news of salvation and the hope for liberation inherent in God incarnate in *Shekhinah*.

### ***Sophia*—Divine Suffering under the Cosmos**

In his schema of the Trinity of God in relation to the cosmos, Arthur Peacocke correlates the immanence of the Creator God with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. According to Peacocke, this doctrine enables Christian thought to conceive of God as creatively and dynamically present and active in the whole of the created cosmos and in the cosmic processes themselves. Moreover, Peacocke notes that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is "peculiarly consonant" with that scientific perspective of the cosmos as emergent, that is, "of a cosmos in which creativity is ever-present" through a "directing agency" that leads to the emergence of humanity.<sup>33</sup> In the

<sup>32</sup> Abraham Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1955) 21.

<sup>33</sup> Peacocke, *Science and the Christian Experiment* 127–28.

panentheistic-procreative model explored here, this presence and action of the Holy Spirit permeates and pervades the Incarnate One, “the firstborn of creation,” the offspring of the divine Mother’s womb. Within the female model of divine travail being developed here, this presence and action of the Holy Spirit is particularly consonant with the female personification of the suffering creativity of God known as *Sophia*.

The appellation *Sophia* represents the Greek translation of the term “wisdom,” which is grammatically feminine in gender not only in Greek, but also in Hebrew (*hokmah*) and Latin (*sapientia*) as well. According to the authors of *Wisdom’s Feast*, *Sophia* initially appears to be a minor figure in the biblical tradition. However, when one attends more closely to her presence, one finds that only four other personalities are written about with greater depth throughout all of Scripture.<sup>34</sup> While the meaning of her name is explicitly “wisdom,” the purview of *Sophia* is creativity. At the moment of creation, *Sophia* was present, delighting in the work of the cosmos, delighting in the creatures of earth (Prov 8:27–31). When Solomon pleaded for the gift of *Sophia*, she revealed herself as the source of “all good things”:

Therefore I prayed, and understanding was given me;  
I called upon God, and the spirit of *Sophia* came to me. . . .  
All good things came to me along with her,  
and in her hands uncounted wealth.  
I rejoiced in them all, because *Sophia* leads them;  
but I did not know that she was their mother (Wis 7:7, 12).

Not only source and mother of creation, but in the unfolding process of creation, *Sophia* “reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well” (Wis 8:1). She is “a breath of the power of God and . . . can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things” (Wis 7:25, 27). As immanent Creator under the evolving cosmos, *Sophia* participates in the creative process, orders existence itself, and continually renews and transforms all creation. As she who is the “designer of all,” *Sophia* has knowledge “of signs and wonders, of the unfolding of the ages and the times” (Wis 8:6, 8). As immanent creativity of the universe, *Sophia* comprehends

The organization of the universe and the force of its elements,  
the beginning and the end and the midpoint of times,  
the changes in the sun’s course and the variations of the seasons.  
cycles of years, positions of the stars, natures of animals, tempers of beasts,  
powers of the winds and thoughts of men,  
uses of plants and virtues of roots—

<sup>34</sup> Susan Cole, Marion Ronan, and Hal Taussig, *Wisdom’s Feast* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1996) 15.

such things as are hidden . . . and such as are plain;  
 for *Sophia*, the artificer of all, taught me . . .  
 and she penetrates and pervades all things by reason of her purity.  
 (Wis 7:17b–22, 24)

Nonetheless, the processes through which such creativity is accomplished do not always manifest power, order, and delight. The continuous creativity of the cosmos identified with the immanent creativity of *Sophia* involves fits and starts, cul-de-sacs and dead ends, trials and errors, pain and death. The operations of both free process and free will are fraught with risk and uncertainty, while the purposeful activity of *Sophia* is diverted and resisted on the path to the emergence of fullness of life. And the Scriptures witness to her passionate response. She flees from deceit and withdraws from the senseless; injustice she cannot bear (Wis 1:5). She groans within the bowels of emergent creation and bemoans resistance to liberation and change. She rails against those who squander opportunities for life and rages against those who reject transformation. Her heart breaks over those who rebuff her invitation to flourish and mourns over those whose self-will leads to death. She suffers the rejection of her creative agency and flares forth in righteous anger:

I called and you refused, I extended my hand and no one took notice;  
 you disdained all my counsel, and my reproof you ignored. . . .  
 The self-will of the simple kills them,  
 the smugness of fools destroys them (Prov 1:24, 32).

Such is the lament of a suffering God, the cry of *Sophia* when her creative dynamism is resisted and refused. Such is the image of *Sophia* as the self-limited God, as she passionately responds to the vagaries and vicissitudes of cosmic freedom and autonomy.

Nevertheless, in her passion and suffering, the immanent *Sophia* definitively “stands . . . as a permanent sign of protest . . . a permanent witness against” cosmic and human suffering.<sup>35</sup> In an evolving universe, although “light must yield to night . . . over *Sophia* evil can never triumph” (Wis 7:30). Through her creative dynamism, *Sophia* enters into creation and its creatures, producing friends of God and prophets against dysteleological suffering and death within the cosmos. Incessantly inspiring humanity and exercising creativity in the cosmos,

*Sophia* calls aloud in the streets,  
 raises her voice in the public squares;  
 calls out at the street corners,  
 and delivers her message at the city gates (Prov 1:20–21).

And the message *Sophia* delivers is a message of life—life that endures in the face of suffering, that emerges through the travail of suffering, and that

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 198.

wells up in the midst of suffering through the creative dynamism of *Sophia-God*.

### Evaluation

The development of the panentheistic-procreative model of the creative suffering of the triune God both fits and exceeds the data derived from Peacocke's evolutionary theology. The model of She Who Is, *Shekhinah*, and *Sophia* as the God who suffers transcendently, incarnately, and immanently in relation to the cosmos fits both Peacocke's conception of the trinity of God-world relationship and his affirmation of the suffering of God in, with, and under the creative processes of the cosmos with their costly unfolding in time. Moreover, in following through Peacocke's proposal of the viability of a female metaphor for God as Creator of the cosmos, this model expands Peacocke's conjectures by developing a model in which all three relationships of the triune God in this panentheistic-procreative model are presented through female imagery extracted from the Jewish and Christian traditions. Furthermore, the facility with which these images function individually and in concert to communicate Peacocke's trinitarian understanding, his inference of the creative suffering of God, and his recommendation of the use of female imagery tends toward a positive assessment of this model's simplicity. This female imagery also leads to a favorable judgment of the model's fecundity, as it presents a novel interpretation of God's triune relationship to the cosmos in a panentheistic paradigm. By doing so, the panentheistic-procreative model encourages other innovative formulations of this relationship as well as other creative concepts of the Divine in female imagery.

Finally, the criterion of pastoral efficacy appears to be fulfilled in three areas. First, this female procreative model affirms female embodiment and celebrates the natural processes of pregnancy and birthing. However, in view of the patriarchal imagination that often predominates in society and in theology, those who propose the image of God as mother must exercise caution. "The metaphor of God as mother can fall into an essentialized category of women as nurturing, life-giving, and sacrificial . . .—a typical description of the gendered female . . . God as mother is helpful to shock a complacent society out of its male metaphors for God, but care must be given not to participate in this same society by falling back on stereotypes of the mother."<sup>36</sup> Johnson also warns against uncritically appropriating the

<sup>36</sup> Tricia Sheffield, "Toward a Theory of Divine Female Embodiment," *Journal of Religion and Society* 4 (2002), <http://moses.creighton.edu/JRS/2002/2002-6.html> (accessed March 21, 2005).

patriarchal idealization of motherhood as normative that relegates women to the private sphere of society. She points out the ambiguous intricacies in the parent-child relationship and emphasizes the limits of all such predilections about God as Creator drawn from the realm of creation. Nevertheless, Johnson adds, "there is . . . powerful and largely untapped truth available in the range of women's experience of having and being mothers that can reshape speech about the mystery of God."<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the model presented above shows the accessibility of female imagery for theological reflection and discourse drawn from the Jewish and Christian traditions. Lastly, the female panentheistic-procreative model demonstrates the dynamic of creativity and suffering in God that is core to Peacocke's evolutionary theology of the suffering God. Clearly, the transcendent She Who Is, the incarnate *Shekhinah*, and the immanent *Sophia* do not remain mired in suffering, but move in, with, and under suffering toward full and emergent life.

#### Ecological Ethics: The Model of Midwifery

In *Creation and the World of Science*, Peacocke asks what the appropriate response and role of humanity might be in relation to creation if they are conceived within the scope of the panentheistic God-world relationship and the scientific perspective. Deeming roles such as dominion and steward as liable to distortion toward a hierarchical understanding of humanity's relation to the rest of creation, Peacocke proposes seven other roles to express the proper relationship of humanity to the cosmos in panentheistic relation to its Creator. These roles are (1) priest of creation, (2) symbiont, (3) interpreter, (4) prophet, (5) lover, (6) trustee and preserver, and (7) cocreator, co-worker, or coexplorer with God the Creator.<sup>38</sup> Each model has merit within Peacocke's theoretical and theological framework, but, in keeping with the procreative model of the creative suffering of the triune God developed above, I propose a model of humanity's role in relation to the cosmos consonant with that of the female procreative paradigm, that of the midwife in the process of procreation.

The procreative model of cosmic creation with its emphasis on natural processes and interdependence parallels the midwife model of human procreativity. In this model, pregnancy and birth are respected as normal and natural life processes that, under most circumstances, do not require the intervention of technological and scientific methods or the use of chemical agents. Based on ancient wisdoms that trust the mother's instincts and intentions for her child, midwifery exercises a model of care that attends

<sup>37</sup> Johnson, *She Who Is* 177–78.

<sup>38</sup> Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science* 281–312.

holistically to the well-being of the expectant mother, the developing child, and of her vigilant loved ones.<sup>39</sup> Professional midwives learn and embrace the values of education and expertise, vigilance and attentiveness, nurturance and gentleness, and sensitivity and respect for the persons and processes involved in the emergence of new life.

These values lead, of course, to a series of ethical actions undertaken by trained midwives. The first ethical action is respectful treatment that fosters nurturance and care for all those involved in the event of pregnancy and birth. It includes the willingness to support natural processes in their unique unfolding and to promote the autonomy and freedom of the mother and the child as they participate in these processes. The second is personal attention that explores the questions involved in the process of birth, attempts to resolve fears and concerns, and develops trusting and nurturing relationships among family members. It also involves vigilance and support attuned to the mother's needs before, during, and after birth. The acquisition and dissemination of information comprises the third ethical action of the midwife. She collects and shares information pertinent to pregnancy and birth and provides practical advice for the care and nutrition of mother and child. She researches the tests and interventions that might be undertaken so that informed choices are made as to their necessity, effects, and risks. Finally, the midwife acts as monitor, advocate, and companion. She carefully evaluates the progress of pregnancy and birth and exercises her expertise in differentiating normal processes and events from those that require remedial interventions. In the event of difficulties, the midwife knows the appropriate specialists from whom to enlist aid. She also empowers the mother to value her own embodiment, to discover her own life-giving capacities, and to move through a healthy process of laboring and birthing free from imposed timetables. Ultimately, the midwife serves as a "sympathetic female companion," mothering the mother as the life within her comes to full term.<sup>40</sup>

From this overview of the role of midwifery in the human process of procreation, certain values and actions present themselves as ecologically and ethically consistent with the panentheistic-procreative paradigm of God-world relation. With regard to a cosmos conceived in procreative terms, the model of midwifery offers the values of education and expertise critical to understanding the entities, processes, and structures of an evolving cosmos and promotes active acquisition and dissemination of information crucial to the survival of the world's fragile ecosystems. The model encourages attentiveness to those choices that facilitate healthy growth and

<sup>39</sup> "Midwives Model of Care," brochure available from Citizens for Midwifery, <http://www.cfmidwifery.org> (accessed February 12, 2005).

<sup>40</sup> "Midwives Model of Care."

development of the cosmos and its creatures and a vigilance that guards against the incursion of elements deleterious to its well-being. In so doing, the model of midwifery urges human persons to act as monitor of and advocate for the full flourishing of cosmic life and encourages particular attention to the misuse or abuse of the environment caused by unregulated technology or chemical pollutants. The model of midwifery further supports attitudes of nurturance and gentleness toward the cosmos that result in respectful treatment of creation and its creatures, thus militating against approaches to the biosphere and atmosphere that trigger despoliation and destruction of ecosystems and their inhabitants. Ultimately, this model fosters respect and reverence for transcendent Mother, incarnate First-born, and immanent Creativity, and inspires the human person to be an active companion in creative travail of the Trinity who, in a labor of love, strains toward the emergence of fullness of life in the new creation.

### **Evaluation**

The model of midwifery I propose as a viable image for human praxis in relation to the cosmos has great consonance with the interdependent models proposed by Peacocke. Demonstrating sound fit with the ecological values and ethical actions that are essential to the flourishing of an evolutionary cosmos, the midwife model of care complements Peacocke's models by proposing a specifically female model consonant with the procreative paradigm. The simplicity of the model of midwifery derives from its direct connection to the procreative paradigm and from its emphasis on inherent, natural processes for the fostering and emergence of life. While the model demonstrates simplicity, there is also a novelty to it that fosters fecundity in its use and interpretation. The model's fecundity is evident in its ability to address issues that affect the transcendent Mother, the incarnate First-born, and the immanent processes of the procreative paradigm, as well as in its intrinsic vigilance against abuse of the cosmic body through misuse of technology and chemical pollutants. The model's pastoral efficacy is seen in how it, like the procreative paradigm itself, affirms female embodiment and celebrates the natural processes of pregnancy and birthing. Moreover, the model advances a specifically female form of advocacy and praxis into ecological theology and environmental ethics and solidifies the connection between the life and processes of both human existence and cosmic existence of which humanity is an integral and inextricable part.

### **Pastoral Ministry: Differentiated Suffering in the Triune God**

In this final section of the article, I return to Arthur Peacocke's understanding of God's transcendent, incarnate, and immanent presence and action in, with, and under the cosmos and its creative, costly processes. This

is an understanding that Peacocke shares with the Christian tradition, and one that he has articulated in different ways throughout his scholarship. However, whether one talks about the triunity of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or as transcendent, incarnate, and immanent in relation to the cosmos, or, now, as She Who Is, *Shekhinah*, or *Sophia*, the affirmation of one God in three divine Persons by the Christian tradition, by Peacocke, and by this article springs from the human experience of God's activities in the economy of salvation and leads to the theological differentiation of activities appropriate to each. Though the Godhead is one, each member of the triune God shares in a distinctive way in the life of the cosmos. As explained by William Hill in *The Three-Personed God*, "What is in reality a common prerogative of the trinitarian members is predicated of one alone to manifest his personal uniqueness in the Godhead. But this cannot be done arbitrarily; some mysterious affinity between a person and an action *ad extra*, or an essential attribute, lies at the base of this kind of speech."<sup>41</sup>

Taking his own approach to this interplay of unity and diversity in the Trinity, Peacocke, in his affirmation of the one God as Creator, points out the Nicene Creed's identification of the Father as the "maker of heaven and earth," of the Son as the one "through whom all things were made," and of the Holy Spirit as the "giver of life." Although Peacocke does not suggest a similar differentiation with regard to the divine suffering of the three Persons in one God, I maintain that there is logic in the assumption that, if members of the Trinity are distinguishable in terms of their modes of creativity, they are also distinguishable in terms of their modes of suffering. Using Peacocke's own relational distinctions, I propose that the incarnate, transcendent, and immanent God may be said to suffer in, with, and under the suffering of the cosmos and its creatures.

What is the point of distinguishing the modes of suffering in the triunity of God? One might point to Hill's theological insight that "some mysterious affinity" exists between a particular Person of the Trinity and an action or an attribute disclosed by God through the economy of salvation. Taking the most obvious application of Hill's suggestion, God incarnate in Jesus the Christ must surely be regarded as suffering in the world. Moreover, the Father could be said to suffer with the Son in suffering his death on the cross. Finally, in the Pauline reference to the travail of creation, the Spirit could be regarded as groaning under the birthing of creation toward full flourishing and liberation.

However, in addition to its theological validity in the economy of salvation, the point of distinguishing modes of suffering in God is also a pastoral

<sup>41</sup> William J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1982) 283.

one. The understanding that God as triune has the capacity to suffer with the cosmos and its creatures in distinctive ways responds to the experiential reality of human suffering that is itself variously distinguished as sympathetic, empathetic, and protopathic. Distinguishing such modes of suffering of the three Persons in God enables human persons to identify their own suffering with the unique sufferings of God. Moreover, distinguishing modes of suffering in the triune God offers different modes for relief of suffering, for example, through sympathetic companioning, through empathetic identification, or through protopathic resistance to suffering and death in cosmic existence associated with each Person of the triune God.

Therefore, using the female panentheistic-procreative paradigm described above, this essay first affirms that, because God is one in relationship to the cosmos, each distinctive type of suffering is experienced by all Persons of the Trinity in relation to the cosmos. In the process of birthing the creation, the transcendent Mother suffers protopathetically under the pangs of labor; in her indwelling, the incarnate *Shekhinah*, like Jesus the Christ, suffers sympathetically with the ostracized and oppressed of the cosmos; and in her participation in the costly creative processes that bring forth new life, the immanent *Sophia* suffers empathetically in the trials and errors of cosmic self-creativity. Nevertheless, I submit that a mysterious affinity pertains among the sympathetic, empathetic, and protopathic forms of suffering and God as transcendent, incarnate, and immanent that could facilitate healing and liberative relationships among the cosmos and its creatures and specific persons of the triune God. While the descriptions of suffering below neither exhaust the range of human and cosmic affliction, nor expend the possible avenues of healing and liberation, they represent in a triune fashion the ways in which divine suffering might be understood to provide a liberative and transformative response to the travail of the cosmos. Furthermore, while I make these attributions in reference to the female panentheistic-procreative Trinity, these forms of suffering manifest an affinity with other trinitarian formulations, including the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit of the Christian tradition.

### **She Who Is—God in Transcendent Sympathy**

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the suffering of sympathy is “the quality or state of being . . . affected by the suffering or sorrow of another; a feeling of compassion or commiseration.”<sup>42</sup> In the female panentheistic-procreative paradigm, this type of suffering has particular affinity with the experience of She Who Is, transcendent Mother of the

<sup>42</sup> “Sympathy,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, <http://dictionary.oed.com> (accessed February 14, 2005).

cosmos. Because of the suffering or sorrow of the other, the cosmos, and its creatures, She Who Is responds sympathetically, suffering passionately as a mother who does not forget the child of her womb, suffering compassionately with the afflicted firstborn of her womb through all the inherent and inflicted travail of its history (Isa 49:15). This sympathetic suffering of She Who Is provides solace, strength, and liberation to those who, in their human suffering, need the knowledge that there is one who companions them in their suffering. It is not necessary that these sufferers find She Who Is in the same state of suffering in which they find themselves. The one thing necessary is that the sufferers find She Who Is with them and available to them in their time of suffering. In this way, such sufferers may experience the unconditional presence and support of this sympathetic companion who encourages and upholds them on their passage through their suffering and death to healing and new life.

### ***Shekhinah*—God in Incarnate Empathy**

Other sufferers, however, experience solace and strength in the sure knowledge that someone has experienced or now experiences suffering and pains akin to their own. Their liberation springs from the realization that they can identify their suffering with another's, and that another identifies with them in their pain. This experience is reflected in the description of suffering as empathy, which entails the capacity of "understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner."<sup>43</sup> Empathy connotes a type of suffering rooted in and shaped by one's own present or past experience of suffering in oneself, by means of which one is able to experience an "identification with and understanding of another's situation, feelings, and motives."<sup>44</sup> Thus, empathetic suffering is an experience uniquely attributable to *Shekhinah*, God-incarnate in the cosmos, who, like Jesus the suffering servant of God, "was despised and rejected," a bearer of sorrows, and acquainted with grief (Isa 53:3–4). Like Jesus, *Shekhinah* shares natural being and becoming and, like other incarnate ones, experiences firsthand the ubiquity of suffering and death in the cosmos. Hence, there is no need for human sufferers to communicate explicitly to *Shekhinah* the sufferings they are enduring. *Shekhinah* knows their sufferings incarnately and experientially.

<sup>43</sup> "Empathy," *Merriam Webster Online Dictionary*, <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=empathy&x=8&y=16> (accessed February 14, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> "Empathy," *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, <http://www.bartleby.com/61/58/E0115800.html> (accessed March 14, 2005).

She has known the rejection they have known; she has suffered their exile and yearned like them for liberation. In this intimate, incarnate, and experiential knowledge of their affliction, *Shekhinah* is able to move with those who suffer and who identify their suffering with *Shekhinah*'s own through their trials and travail to liberation and resurrection.

### ***Sophia*—God in Immanent Protopathy**

Finally, liberation and healing come to some sufferers through experiences of a dynamic resistance to suffering and an unrelenting urgency toward right relationship and life within themselves or within another. Such sufferers recognize a particular form of suffering associated with experiences and events that obstruct creativity and the emergence of life in the cosmos and in its creatures—events of oppression and exploitation, events of violence and injustice, events of destruction and despoliation. It is not a suffering with another or a suffering in union with another. It is a primal and immediate suffering that wells up under and through the passions of those who yearn and strive for the full flourishing of human and cosmic being whenever such flourishing is at risk of frustration or demise. This is a suffering described as protopathy and is defined as a primary suffering that is immediately produced, not consequent to or produced by another's suffering.<sup>45</sup> This is the suffering of *Sophia*, the God who is immanent within the cosmic processes. Protopathy is the suffering of *Sophia*-God who experiences with unparalleled immediacy the events within creation and its history that militate against that movement toward the new creation in which life and right relations within the universe come to fulfillment in the reign of God. This primal suffering, moreover, reverberates with the righteous rage, resolute resistance, and ethical activity of *Sophia*-God in opposition to all that hinders the creativity of the cosmos and everything that spawns the senseless suffering inflicted against its communion of life. Empowered by the suffering of *Sophia* immanent in the being and becoming of the cosmos, these sufferers find healing and liberation in that vivified suffering toward new creation that no dysteleological suffering can ultimately thwart. In Johnson's words, Holy *Sophia* "keeps vigil through endless hours of pain while her grief awakens protest. The power of this divine symbol works not just to console those who are suffering, but to strengthen those bowed by sorrow to hope and resist. If God grieves with them in the midst of disaster, then there may yet be a way forward."<sup>46</sup>

### **Evaluation**

The pastoral model of the threefold differentiation of suffering in the trinity of God represents a novel application of the data of Peacocke's

<sup>45</sup> "Protopathy," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

<sup>46</sup> Johnson, *She Who Is* 260–61.

trinitarian theology. In its fit with his theological position, this pastoral model affirms the oneness of Divine Being that makes the activities of the Divine essentially unified in relation to the cosmos, as well as the diversity of Divine Becoming that makes such activities distinctive in relation to the cosmos. This unity-in-diversity leads with theoretical simplicity, therefore, to the possibility of appropriating specific forms of suffering to the Persons of the Trinity on the basis of that “mysterious affinity” that rises from personal analogy and personal experience toward the attributes of God conceived as personal. There is, moreover, fecundity in this attempt to attribute different forms of suffering to the Persons of God, since the proposals set forth above represent only preliminary steps toward further explorations of the mystery of God in the experience of cosmic and human suffering. Finally, as laid out above, the pastoral efficacy of this proposal is clear. The threefold differentiation of suffering within the triune relationship of God to the cosmos and its creatures enables human persons to identify their own suffering with the unique sufferings of the triune God, to experience their own suffering mitigated or transformed in ways appropriate to the needs of each creature and the desires of each human heart, and to find models through which they might respond to the suffering of others in the cosmic community.

Despite this affirmation of the pastoral efficacy of differentiating types of suffering within God, there is clearly a need to struggle with the way in which the suffering of the triune God may be conceived in response to the suffering and death inherent in the processes of the cosmos in contrast to what is inflicted through the exercise of human free will. Peacocke does not distinguish between the suffering of God in relation to the creative processes of the cosmos and the suffering of God in relation to the exercise of human free will. For Peacocke, God’s suffering in relation to free process and free will stems from God’s transcendent, incarnate, and immanent relation to the cosmos and its creatures within a panentheistic paradigm. Whether suffering and death are associated with the evolutionary creativity of the cosmos or with the human capacity to hinder or thwart such creativity through the exercise of free will, the fact that suffering and death *per se* exist in the cosmos provides a sufficient basis for Peacocke to infer that a God who relates transcendentally, incarnately, and immanently to the cosmos and its creatures in a panentheistic paradigm suffers in, with, and under the sufferings of the cosmos with its costly unfolding in time.

However, if one sets out to differentiate forms of suffering in God as I have done here, one must wrestle with the notion that divine suffering in response to cosmic processes that tend toward new life may conceivably be different than divine suffering in response to human choices and actions inimical to the emergence of such life. Careful to avoid generalization, one might venture to say that, in response to the suffering and death generated

by natural evolutionary processes, God may be conceived as suffering sympathetically and empathetically with those creatures affected by the vagaries of cosmic processes—earthquakes and tsunamis, hurricanes and droughts, predation and natural selection, cell mutations and disease. However, since such events in the evolutionary schema do not arise from processes that are essentially contrary to the self-creativity of the cosmos, one might tentatively suggest that they may not arouse the protopathic suffering of the Divine associated with the obstruction of divine purpose. On the other hand, in response to the suffering and death associated with the human exercise of free will that hinders the divine intention toward life and full flourishing in the cosmos and its creatures, one might suggest that God not only suffers sympathetically and empathetically with those affected by such harmful decisions, but also suffers protopathetically, since such decisions are detrimental to the divine impetus toward fullness of life in the universe.

Indisputably, further reflection and exploration of the dynamics that exist in the interaction between inherent and inflicted suffering in the cosmos and differentiated suffering in God are clearly warranted in response to the issues examined and raised by this article. Such reflection and exploration could demonstrate the fecundity of the proposals set forth here by entering more deeply into the attribution of different types of suffering to God in relation to evolutionary suffering and death in contrast to the inflicted suffering and death that cry out for justice. Moreover, it could potentially augment the pastoral efficacy of these proposals by proposing an array of responses modeled on the creative suffering of the triune God that are available to human persons who strive to address discriminately and effectively the suffering inherent in the free processes of the cosmos as opposed to the suffering wreaked upon the cosmos and its creatures through the abuse of free will.

### CONCLUSION

Through words that “strain, crack and sometimes break under the burden”<sup>47</sup> of the mysteries of God, of cosmic suffering, and of the relation between the two, I have offered three proposals that appear ripe with potential for influencing theological discourse and praxis concerning the creative suffering of the triune God, and I have demonstrated that these proposals exhibited the fit with data, simplicity, fecundity, and pastoral efficacy set as criteria of validity. The question remains, however, whether any concept of the suffering of God can adequately respond to the expe-

<sup>47</sup> T. S. Eliot, “Little Gidding,” *American Poems*, <http://www.americanpoems.com> (accessed January 4, 2005).

rience of existential suffering endemic in the cosmos. In the view of this article, however, it is not the denial of suffering in God that mitigates existential and experiential misery in the cosmos and its creatures. Rather, it is the affirmation of the suffering of God that characterizes the Divine as trustworthy and efficacious in the face of the existential reality of suffering in human and nonhuman creation. Such a theology of the suffering triune God does not leave the sufferer with theodicy's dilemma of whether God can arbitrarily intervene but refuses to do so for some reason known only to God. Instead, the interaction of evolutionary science and the Christian tradition enables a pastorally efficacious understanding of a triune God who is familiar with suffering and bears cosmic grief. Such a theology functions to disabuse Christians of the notion that God is the source of cosmic or personal suffering and draws Christians to recognize that the triune God is the companion-sufferer who understands and participates in the plight of the afflicted. Moreover, this model does not eternalize or glorify suffering, but argues that cosmic suffering grieves the Creator as it grieves the created. By sharing the suffering of creation, the triune God demonstrates that suffering itself is not redemptive and salvific. Rather, it is the love, creativity, and infinite possibility within the Divine that is redemptive through continuous creativity, unconditional presence, and freely offered grace. Such redemptive creativity is an affirmation rooted in both theology and evolutionary science. Theologically, it arises from the understanding that the Creator God is immanent and incarnate within suffering creation and at the same time infinitely transcends it. Scientifically, it arises from the evolutionary insight that the Creator and creation are not mired in suffering and death, but possess the infinite creativity to move toward transformation, liberation, and new life. In addition, because it is the cosmos and not merely humanity that participates in the being, life, and creativity of the Divine in this model, the creative suffering of God inspires an ethics of care that is personal, communal, and ecological. As Christians grow to contemplate and to emulate the God who embraces, permeates, and suffers with both human and cosmic being, action for restoration, transformation, and liberation will extend not only to abused and violated persons, but also to the abused and violated cosmos itself.