SIX CHARACTERISTICS OF A POSTPATRIARCHAL CHRISTIANITY

by Jay McDaniel

Abstract. Christianity is best understood not as a set of timeless doctrines, but as a historical movement capable of change and growth. In this respect, Christianity is like a science. Heretofore, most instances of Christianity have exhibited certain ways of thinking that, taken as a whole, have led to the subordination of women (and the Earth and animals as well) to men in power. This article describes these ways of thinking, then contrasts six ways of thinking and acting that can inform postpatriarchal Christianity and science.

Keywords: value-hierarchical thinking; value-pluralistic thinking; unilateral power; relational power; dualistic thinking; nondualistic thinking; feminist theology; postpatriarchal theory; God.

For at least four thousand years the creeds, codes, and cults of the world's major religions have been controlled by men. Men, not women, have been the primary social and imaginative engineers of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Shintoism. Consider, for example, a list of prime movers upon whom introductions to the world religious so often focus: Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad in the West; Gautama, Mahavira, Sankara, and Ramanuja in India; Confucius, Mencius, Lao-tzu, and Chuang-tzu in China; and Shinran, Honen, Dogen, and Nichiren in Japan. Of course, women have contributed

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to the development of the world religions, but they have not been equal partners. More often than not they have been helpmates, working in homes and behind the scenes to help men in positions of leadership, and all too often—as the histories of European witch burning, Indian widow burning, and Chinese foot binding attest—they have been, victims. Mary Daly does not exaggerate in saying that for at least four thousand years patriarchy has been, and still is, "the prevailing religion of the entire planet." As she puts it, "all of the so-called religions legitimating patriarchy are mere sects subsumed under its vast umbrella/canopy" (1978, 39).

For most feminist philosophers and theologians the word *patriarchy* has two meanings. It refers to a social system in which men rule women economically, politically, and culturally; and it also refers to a way of thinking and feeling, guided by a conceptual framework, that supports and legitimates this social system. This way of thinking and feeling can be internalized by women as well as by men, and it may or may not be a subject of conscious reflection. As philosopher Karen Warren explains, "whether we know it or not, each of us operates out of a socially constructed mind set or conceptual framework, i.e., a set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions which shape, reflect, and explain our view of ourselves and our world" (1987, 6). When I use the word *patriarchy* in this essay, I mean it primarily in the second sense.

The ideas and images within a patriarchal conceptual framework need not be about women in order to affect women. Instead, they may deal with the nature of the human self, or the good life, or the world as a whole, or God. When in the West, for example, Christians have imaged God as male, that very imagery, though apparently referring to the divine rather than the human, has nevertheless suggested to many men, and to women as well, that women are less godlike than men and, hence, that women are rightly subjugated to men. And when the good life has been imaged as one that is in complete control of nonhuman nature, that very image, though apparently referring only to nature, has led to the view that women, too, are to be controlled or tamed, because they have been symbolically identified with nature.

Furthermore, as writers such as Rosemary Ruether have shown, it is not exclusively women who have been detrimentally affected by patriarchy. At least in the West, images that have supported male rule over women have also supported the rule of rich over poor, race over race, culture over culture, and humanity over nature. The attitudes that have enabled sexism to persist also enable classism, racism, cultural chauvinism, and anthropocentrism to persist.

As the work of Warren suggests, this is because Western patriarchal thinking has been characterized by three features: value-hierarchical thinking, a logic of domination, and certain conceptual dualisms.

Value-hierarchical thinking consciously or subconsciously tends to categorize differences—for example, between men and women, or rich and poor, or light skin and dark skin, or humanity and nature—in terms of the spatial metaphor "up" versus "down," evaluating one group as *higher* than, and thus *superior to*, the other. Warren does not argue that evaluations of superior and inferior are inevitably illegitimate; indeed, she deems a nonsexist society superior to a sexist one. Rather, she proposes that Western patriarchal thinking has been prone to draw hierarchical distinctions *at the expense* of recognizing and appreciating valuable forms of diversity. Western patriarchal thinking has been prone to rank differences at the expense of appreciating them. Amid this tendency, women and others have been seen and treated as inferior. They have been viewed not simply as different from the men in power, but as inferior to them.

A logic of domination issues from value-hierarchical thinking, and that "explains, justifies, and maintains the subordination of an "inferior" group by a "superior" group on the grounds of the alleged inferiority or superiority of the respective group" (1987, 6). In the process, it justifies the right of one group to exercise unilateral power over the other. From the perspective of the one exercising unilateral power, the power may be for good or ill; but in either case it is power *over* rather than power *with*. In the West this is the power that God has been said to have in relation to the world: the power to influence without being influenced, to shape without being shaped. It is also the power, Warren claims, that many men in the West have thought they ought to exercise over women and nature, people of color, and the poor.

Conceptual dualisms are dichotomized items of reflection (human and nonhuman, mind and body, self and other, history and nature, reason and emotion) in which the items are conceived as essentially independent and mutually exclusive. To think in terms of dualisms is to think in terms of mutually external substances, or self-enclosed atoms, and of either/or rather than both/and. It is to believe, for example, that reason and feeling are essentially independent from one another and that one must be either rational or emotional, not both; or that the self and the world are mutually external and that one must love either the self or the world, not both. Often, Warren suggests, hierarchical thinking has been applied to conceptual dualisms, so that one side of the dualism is valued "up" and the other

"down." Warren avers that women and others have often been associated with items on the "down" side—with feeling rather than reason, with body rather than mind, with nature rather than history. In the process they have been subjugated to the "higher" powers: to men, who have been associated with mind, reason, and history.

To criticize patriarchy is not to suggest that patriarchal social systems have been bereft of created goods. In the West alone, witness the music of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven; the literature of Chaucer, Dante, and Shakespeare; the painting of Michelangelo, Rembrandt, and Picasso; the philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, and Marx; and the science of Newton, Darwin, and Einstein. These goods emerged out of, and with the support of, patriarchal social arrangements. Consider also the countless lives of unnamed men and women, from all walks of life, who have lived and died amid patriarchal social arrangements with satisfaction and who have found meaning in patriarchy. It would be simpleminded—and patriarchal—to draw a sharp line between patriarchy and postpatriarchy, and then to treat one as unambiguously good compared to the other, which is unambiguously evil. Patriarchy is not the root of all evil, and all evil will not be eliminated in an elimination of patriarchy. Every social system and way of thinking has involved, and will involve, both good and evil.

To criticize patriarchy, however, is to recognize that opportunities for cultural achievement in patriarchal social systems have not been equally shared and that social benefits have been won at great cost, in lives and well-being, to *many* women, to *many* poor, to *many* people of color, to *many* animals, and to *much* land. For the victims of patriarchal social arrangements, the benefits and achievements have not outweighed the costs. Feminists rightly hope for something better in the future. They call for the envisionment of alternative, postpatriarchal perspectives that can help guide us, women and men alike, beyond an age of male rule and its attendant oppressions toward an age of greater peace, justice, and ecological sustainability.

It is with the envisionment of such alternative perspectives, aligned with hope for alternative futures, that theology is most pertinent. For the task of theology—at least of Christian theology, influenced by prophetic biblical traditions—is not simply to interpret inherited symbols of thought; its task is to imagine new and hopeful ways of thinking and feeling in light of existing needs in the present. It is to exercise what biblical scholar Walter Brueggeman calls "the prophetic imagination," whose task is "to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness

and perception of the dominant culture around us" (1978, 13). Of course, in the latter decades of the twentieth century Christian theology has very little influence in secular colleges and universities around the world. When theologians speak, few academicians listen. But some forms of Christian theology have considerable influence outside secular colleges and universities. They influence faculties in seminaries, who in turn influence church leaders, who in turn influence religious communities. Religious communities are formidable influences in the world today, and Christians alone number almost a quarter of the world's population. Thus one of the least prestigious intellectual endeavors in the academy is one of the most influential in the world. For this reason, it is important that theology seek to become postpatriarchal. In Christianity, the possibility of a full-fledged postpatriarchal theology will for long remain an ideal rather than a reality, but it is an ideal worth striving toward, and it *is* being striven toward. Even today, some theological perspectives come closer than others to approximating it.

What ideas might constitute contemporary approximations of postpatriarchal vision? And what role do women have, on the one hand, and men, on the other, in shaping these ideas? The purpose of this essay is to answer these questions. In the first of its three sections I introduce Christian feminist theology for the general reader and discuss the roles of women and men in the development of postpatriarchal perspectives. Section I is written for those in the natural and social sciences, and the humanities as well, who are interested in gender bias in society but unaware of attempts to overcome it in religious thought. Sections II and III, for both specialist and non-specialist, show how "process theology" creates postpatriarchal religious perspectives and, finally, the six characteristics of a post-patriarchal orientation.

I. The Roles of Women and Men in Creating Postpatriarchal Theologies

As suggested above, patriarchal thinking in the West has involved value-hierarchical thinking, a logic of dominance, and conceptual dualisms. Although these traits are not necessarily characteristic of patriarchal thinking throughout the world—a Buddhist culture, for example, might evince patriarchal thinking that emphasizes interconnectedness and relationality rather than atomized dualisms—patriarchal thinking, whatever its content, functions to legitimate and support male rule.

Androcentrism as a Universal Characteristic of Patriarchy

Despite the possibility of variation in patriarchal thinking, one aspect of it seems universal: its conceptual frameworks are almost always male centered, or androcentric, in two related ways. First, they repress and devalue women and women's experience as source of insight and vision for both women and men. Second, they absolutize male experience as representative of human experience in general. These two aspects of androcentrism constitute the gender bias that has often been characteristic of the world's major religions.

The devaluation of women and women's experience in Western religious thought has been well documented, from Paul's injunction that married women should remain silent in church, because they can get their spiritual food from their husbands (1 Cor 14:33–36), through Aquinas's view (following Aristotle) that women are misbegotten males, to Ignatius of Loyola's view that Satan conducts himself "like a woman," in that he is weak before a show of strength but a tyrant if he has his will. Moreover, such devaluation is also characteristic of Eastern religions and ethics: in Confucianism, for example, a woman's role is to serve her parents, husband, and husband's parents, along the way producing sons for her husband. And the Buddha had to be persuaded, against his inclinations, to allow creation of an order of nuns, on which he laid special regulations and subordinated to monks. For Gautama and Confucius as for Paul and Loyola, the experiences of women did not rank equally with those of men.

The second characteristic of androcentric thinking—the absolutization of male experience—has been part of the very method of much global theology and philosophy. In his description of his method of philosophizing, Thomas Hobbes, the Western philosopher, captures the nature of the androcentric method. He writes that "from the similitude of the thoughts and passions of one man to the thoughts and passions of another, whosoever looketh into himself, and considereth what he doth when he does think, opine, reason, hope, fear, etc . . . he shall thereby read and know what are the thoughts and passions of all other men upon like occasions" (quoted in Zimmerman 1987, 21). It does not seem to have occurred to Hobbes that his experiences may have been shaped by his gender and may not represent those of women. The result of such one-sided universalization is that norms are established that, though imposed on and internalized by women, are not necessarily relevant to them—or even to other men.

In Western theology, which until recent times has been almost

completely created by men, sin has often been identified with pride, and virtue with self-sacrificial love. The men who proclaimed this—Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich, to give two examples from the twentieth century—have usually believed that their claims are relevant to all humans under any circumstances. However, drawing from studies of women's experience, theologians such as Valerie Saiving, Sue Dunfee, and Judith Plaskow, have pointed out the limitations of such thinking. They show that self-sacrificial love may be relevant to men who have a positive self-regard and a strong ego, but it is much less relevant (and sometimes destructive) to women and powerless men who suffer from negative self-regard and need, if not an ego to be sacrificed, a self to be possessed. For them, one-sided emphasis on the virtues of self-sacrificial love leads to an underdevelopment or negation of self. In the Christian tradition, had women been cocreators of theology, such androcentric one-sidedness might have been avoided.

Feminist Theologies and Postpatriarchal Theologies

Why has androcentrism prevailed in so many of the world religions? The reasons are complex. From different ends of the political spectrum come such explanations as cultural conditioning, male conspiracy, female complicity, biological determination, or various combinations thereof. *Whatever* the reason, one thing is clear: slowly but surely, among creative minorities in the religious world, things are changing.

Feminist theologies often are *critical*, which means they attempt to unmask the gender biases of classical theologies. They are also *constructive*, which means they attempt new understandings of self, world, and the divine. These new understandings speak to the experiences of women in ways that patriarchal religious opinions have not. To speak *to* the experience of women is to illuminate where women have been under patriarchy and to show where they can be after patriarchy. In terms of world religions, such "speaking" is unique. Most male-designed theologies have spoken about and for women, but they have not spoken *to* women in terms women have defined.

In many instances, to speak *to* the experience of women is really to speak *about* the experience of men. Many feminist theologies do this by attempting to understand how and why men have been responsible for, and influenced by, patriarchy. They describe male behavior, and in so doing they often imagine the intentions, attitudes, and dispositions of men. Although an understanding of male intentions is

not the primary aim of feminist theology, it is important. If male rule is to be overcome, it must be understood, and if it is to be understood, men must be understood. To understand men is not simply to know how they behave; it is to know how they think and feel. Of course, generalizations are dangerous, because men (like women) are different within societies, and from one society to another, and from one individual to another. It is important to point out, however, that feminist theology is for the most part a white woman's movement and thus subject to racial limitations. But generalizations are inevitable and important; without them, there is no insight.

Sometimes, as in Ruether's thought, feminist theologies attempt to speak to the experience of men. Explicitly or implicity, they indicate postpatriarchal ways of thinking, feeling, and acting by which men's lives might be informed. This, too, is an act of imagination, and a hopeful act, because men have also been victimized by patriarchal machismo. By conforming to patriarchal images of "masculinity," men have denied themselves a realization of their full humanity. They have been strong at the expense of being vulnerable, rational at the expense of being emotional, assertive at the expense of being receptive. This is not to say that women are by nature vulnerable, emotional, and receptive; rather, it is to say that whatever women are by nature (which is best left for women to decide), men also need such qualities.

Given the originality and promise of feminist theologies for men as well as women, it is understandable that men might want to join women in creating feminist theologies. Unfortunately, they—we—cannot. Despite the terminology, feminist theology does not mean only theology that speaks to women, and perhaps to men; it also means it speaks from the experience of women as women. Feminist theologies are created by women from women's experience as partially shaped by, and partially transcendent of, patriarchy. These theologies may speak truths that are relevant to men, but they speak these truths as they emerge from woman's experience. It would be as difficult, arrogant, and self-deceptive for a man to do feminist theology as for a North American to do Latin American liberation theology or for a white to do black theology.

What, then, can men do? It is important that they do something, for (barring an unforeseen shift in power relations throughout the world) it is doubtful that patriarchy can be transcended without male cooperation. In religion, men can (first and most important) internalize the insights of feminist theologies and attempt to rid their vision and practices of gender bias. This takes time, patience, study, openness to change, receptivity to criticism, and willingness to

relinquish power. Second, men can attempt to construct perspectives that see beyond patriarchy. Although men cannot construct feminist theologies, they can attempt to construct postpatriarchal theologies.

A postpatriarchal theology is critical of gender bias and its ways of thinking, and attempts to construct ideas and images that point to ways of living—for women, men, and both—that supersede patriarchy. Postpatriarchal feminist theologies are created by women out of women's experience; some are intended to be relevant to women alone, others are intended to be relevant to men and women, and both types are indispensable for men who wish to construct postpatriarchal religious perspectives.

As yet, there is no name for the theology created by men in response to, and in solidarity with, feminist theologies. Nor is there an accepted name for male-envisioned postpatriarchal theology. There is, however, a resource for such theology, and it is called process theology.

II. Process Theology as Postpatriarchal Theology

Process theology itself has been in process. Most of its advocates have been men, but it is increasingly used by women for developing feminist theologies.

What do feminists find helpful about process theology? In general, as Penelope Washbourn explains, both process and feminist thought, attempt "to revise the fundamental categories of the Western tradition" in similar directions (Washbourn 1981, 85). Both criticize a static, hierarchical social order and advocate an alternative "participatory" social order: both deplore the absolute power of God and propose alternative ways of envisioning the Divine: both criticize atomistic understandings of the self and propose, instead, that the human self is both relational and self-creative; both criticize dualisms between humanity and nature and insist, instead, that humanity is part of nature; both criticize anthropocentric ethics and emphasize, instead, the intrinsic value of all living beings, human and nonhuman.

This process theology is in a unique situation. It offers a conceptual bridge on which women and men can travel separately—and, if they wish, together, in conversation with one another—to attempt to move from patriarchy to postpatriarchy. Of course, the bridge is built as it is traversed. Planks already laid by men may have to be replaced, and many (if not most) of the planks that have not yet been laid will be laid by women. Moreover, there is no guarantee that, even at a conceptual level, the other shore will be reached or that, if reached, it

will make a difference. Whether process perspectives take hold in seminaries and religious communities remains to be seen. But the attempt is worth considering, because it shows what a postpatriarchal Christianity, guided by a postpatriarchal theology, might look like.

Christianity as a Changing Tradition

Women and men who are developing process postpatriarchal orientations acknowledge that a postpatriarchal Christianity, envisioned by process theologians or other feminist thinkers, is a *new* Christianity. Although it may be influenced by what Rosemary Ruether calls "usable traditions," both biblical and postbiblical, orthodox and unorthodox, and Christian and non-Christian, it synthesizes aspects of these traditions in unprecedented ways. It involves ways of thinking, feeling, speaking, and acting that cannot be traced to, and in some respects diverge from, the dominant traditions of the Christian pasts.

Thus the question arises: Is a new Christianity still Christianity? Process theologians believe it is. They argue that Christianity always has been, and ought to be, an ongoing process, capable of growth and development, rather than a settled and fixed fact that repeats its past. It is a historical movement, pluralistic and developmental from its beginnings, rather than a set of timeless abstractions. To participate in this contemporary movement is not necessarily to repeat the past; it may be to help inaugurate a new future.

This is not to suggest that Christians should forget the past. On the contrary, they should remember it, if only not to repeat it. Nor is it to suggest the past is never worthy of repetition; indeed, it can sometimes serve as a resource for, and judge of, the present. For example, whole generations of Christians in capitalist societies have fallen from (rather than advanced beyond) the socialism of early Christian communities. And in many ways patriarchal Christians have fallen from (rather than advanced beyond) the egalitarian Christianity of the original Jesus movement (Fiorenza 1983). To say that Christianity is capable of growth is not to say that it has always grown in a positive direction. Sometimes it has regressed, and subsequent generations sometimes have much to learn from prior generations.

To say that Christianity is capable of growth, however, is to say that, in the last analysis, Christians must evaluate themselves and determine what is and is not to be called Christian on the basis of future hopes rather than past achievements. Even when the past is appreciated as a resource, it must be appreciated because it is

resourceful for the future, not because it is an unquestionable authority in its own right. To treat it as an unquestionable authority is to fall into an idolatry of tradition, thereby obstructing the possibility of new life.

Process thinkers contend that authentic Christian life is formed by an anticipated future rather than a settled past, a future that is partially realizable in the present and toward which humans are beckoned by God. This is a future for which Jesus seems to have yearned as he healed the sick and announced "good news" to the poor. It is a future of *shalom*—of love and justice among people, of harmony with nature and communion with God. This means that, in the interests of *shalom* for women as well as men and in faithfulness to a God who perpetually beckons toward *shalom*, Christians can repent (or turn around) from ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that their predecessors often embodied. They can repent from patriarchy, and thereby effect a transformation of the tradition in which they participate, enabling it to move beyond what it has been toward what it can be.

A postpatriarchal theology is not the only way, however, in which this transformation occurs. In addition to new ways of thinking, new forms of worship are required, as are new ways of speaking and new modes of social interaction. Religion, Christianity included, is much more than theology. Nevertheless, theology is important because it helps guide people toward new ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.

III. Six Characteristics of a Postpatriarchal Christianity

To understand postpatriarchal modes of thinking, feeling, and acting, we should consider six aspects of a postpatriarchal Christianity as seen in a process theology: (1) value-pluralistic thinking and care, (2) a logic of relational power, (3) a nondualistic approach to reason and feeling, (4) the self as creative, relational, and dynamic, (5) nature as evolutionary and ecological but not mechanistic, and (6) God as Heart.

The first three aspects pertain not so much to notions of the self, world, or God but to dispositions—that is, to the styles of thinking and modes of feeling that are encouraged in process postpatriarchal theologies. To understand these dispositions, recall Karen Warren's argument that, in the West, the patriarchal mind-set has been disposed toward value-hierarchical thinking, a logic of domination or unilateral power, and certain forms of conceptual dualism. She also believes that these habits of mind have led to an oppression of women and of powerless men, people of other races and religion, fellow

animals, and the earth. Process theologians agree, and they point out that classical Christian ways of thinking, including some biblical ways of thinking, have been similarly disposed. They propose for our internalization three alternative dispositions, as follows.

Value-Pluralistic Thinking and the Importance of Care. The first of these three dispositions is value-pluralistic thinking, which can be best understood by comparing it to a traditional form of hierarchical thinking in Christianity, or the thinking that has given rise to Christian exclusivism. Until recently, Catholics have claimed that outside the Church there is no salvation, and Protestants have claimed that outside Christianity there is no salvation. To be a Christian has been to hold to a set of principles and practices labeled Christian at the expense of appreciating, and being transformed by, other peoples and other insights. Christianity has been valued "up" at the expense of "other Ways," which have been valued "down."

Process theologians propose, instead, that a postpatriarchal Christianity is a "Way that excludes no ways." It is disposed to recognize and appreciate a plurality of life-paths, life-styles, and life-orientations, which is to say that it is inclined toward value-pluralistic rather than value-hierarchical thinking. The phrase "Way that excludes no ways" is borrowed from John Cobb, who proposes that the Way of Christianity can (and ought) to be one in which different forms of value—discovered among non-Christian religions, in women, and in nonhuman forms of life—are appreciated and in which Christians are "creatively transformed" as they recognize and affirm these different values (Cobb 1975, 22). Indeed, Cobb identifies the living Christ with the transformation that emerges from an embrace of pluralism.

Of course, there are limits for Cobb as there are for all process theologians. Tolerance must be a principled tolerance; at some point, hierarchical thinking is necessary. Life-orientations that promote the well-being of women as well as men, for example, are higher and worthier of affirmation than those that promote men at the expense of women. But there can be *many* life-enhancing life-orientations—African as well as Asian, Latin American as well as North American, Oceanic as well as European, rural as well as urban, homosexual as well as heterosexual, female as well as male. None of these Ways need be absolutized; all have capacities for evil as well as good. Yet each can have beauty and integrity in its own right, and each can add to our lives and to the divine Life. A postpatriarchal Christianity is a Way that hierarchizes as a last, not a first, resort.

Out of this desire not to exclude others a deep concern for justice emerges. To be "open" to other people is not simply to acknowledge

their right to exist, it is to be influenced by them. It is to listen to others, to hear them on their own terms, to feel their feelings, to share their destinies, and to revision one's perspective with theirs in mind. A postpatriarchal Christianity is particularly open to those who are excluded by the societies in which they live: the victims, the outcasts, the forgotten, the unwanted, the marginalized, the despised, the poor. The consequence of such openness is a hunger for justice. This hunger does not issue from abstract principles, understood to drive from an inscrutable God or a transcendent rationality, but from connectedness with those who suffer. It issues from care.[1]

Care of this sort has often been identified in the West with "the feminine." Feminists, of course, object to this stereotype because they recognize that it has given a one-sided and distorted notion of women's capacities and because it was created by men. In fact, "the feminine" in the West—like "the feminine" in many other cultures—has been male-defined; it has been the "patriarchal feminine." Postpatriarchal Christians need not dwell on whether care is feminine or masculine. Instead, they propose that it is (or can be) human: responsiveness to others than can be embodied by women and men.

Relational Power. A life of care is by no means powerless, given the notion of power that postpatriarchal Christians find most meaningful. According to Karen Warren, the power emphasized in Western patriarchy is unilateral power: the power of complete control over another. Feminists such as Audre Lord and Susan Griffin insist that this is the power men desire to exercise over women and nature. These women propose, as do process theologians, that another kind of power is more desirable and more in touch with reality.

In process theology this alternative form is called relational power—or, as Rita Nakashima Brock speaks of it, "erotic power" (1988, 25). Such power lies within the depths of our relations to ourselves, to our bodies, to others, and to the world. It is erotic because it is imbued with Eros, a yearning to be as richly related to others as possible and therein discover the fullness of life. A postpatriarchal Christianity will emphasize that women and men can find fulfillment in and through relational rather than unilateral power. Relational power has two inseparable aspects. First, it is a power to receive influences from the past, from other people, and from the surrounding world. Webster's dictionary gives a definition of power as "the capacity for being acted upon or undergoing an effect"; however, this understanding—power to receive influences—is neglected in English parlance because, for us, *power* ordinarily

connotes control over others. Despite the distortion of the word by the image of control, we recognize a kind of strength in people whose minds are so open that they can receive and then integrate many intellectual influences, or whose hearts are so open that they can hear and understand different kinds of people without being narrow and intolerant. We recognize strength in those who can feel deeply, who can share in the sufferings and joys of others, who can affirm the uniqueness of each individual as an added dimension of richness in their own lives. This strength is the receptive side of relational power. It is the power to be open-minded and openhearted, and to be changed in the process. The antithesis of defensiveness, it is the strength to be creatively vulnerable.

In its second aspect, relational power is the power to determine one's destiny, to express oneself creatively, and thereby to influence others. Thus relational power bears a resemblance to unilateral power because it affects the world, yet it differs in a very important way. Unilateral power aims to control others in a way that subverts their creativity and thereby minimizes opportunities for reciprocal influence. By contrast, relational power aims to influence others in a way that appreciates and inspires their creativity and invites their influence.

In Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* (1984), Celie's dominating and abusive husband had unilateral power over her; relational power is the power that Shug, Celie's newfound lover, had with her. Those who have read the novel will recognize that Shug was by no means weak and nonassertive. She had a powerful effect on Celie, yet her power in relation to Celie neither sought nor obtained full control. Rather, it influenced Celie in a way that inspired Celie's creative response. It empowered Celie, and was empowered in turn by the unpredictability of Celie's response.

The role of surprise, of unpredictability, in relational power is important. Whereas in unilateral power the good to be achieved in control is predicted by the one seeking control, thus limiting outcomes, in relational power the good emerges from the relationship itself. For this reason a central feature of relational power in human interactions is risk: the risk that if one is not in complete control of the other, richer experiences can emerge for oneself and the other (paradoxically) than if one is in full control. Fear is the primary obstacle to such risk.

Postpatriarchal Christians need not hope for a world in which unilateral control is eliminated; some unilateral power is inevitable in human relations and in relations between humanity and the rest of nature. Rather, they can hope for a world in which relational power is

maximized and unilateral power minimized. They can hope for a world in which "true power"—that is, the most desirable form of power—includes vulnerability as well as creativity, dependence as well as self-expression, and being affected as well as affecting. Such power (as will be suggested) is concordant with divine power.

Nondualistic Thinking and the Importance of Feeling. In addition to value-pluralistic thinking and relational power, postpatriarchal Christians will emphasize nondualistic thinking. This does not mean, however, that they will oppose all distinctions; one can think nondualistically and yet make important distinctions between things—say between the psyche and the body, or between humanity and nature, or between God and the world. To emphasize nondualistic thinking is to oppose the assumption that the "things" to be distinguished are atomistic and, hence, exist in independence from one another, or that one of them exists in absolute independence from the other. Dualistic thinking is atomistic thinking.

The alternative is nondualistic, or relational, thinking. To think in this way is to recognize that, logically and indeed ontologically, every actuality—whether material or psychological, secular or sacred, human or nonhuman, terrestrial or celestial—exists in relation to, and hence in partial dependence on, countless other actualities. This recognition is profoundly Buddhist; it is also, from the vantage point of some scientists, profoundly scientific. It is no accident that in developing their theological orientations process theologians have been shaped by, and indebted to, insights from Asia, from modern biology, and from modern physics. As do most Buddhists and many scientists, process thinkers submit that there are no independent substances, no self-enclosed atoms, no isolated "things." Although human beings and other animals are partially self-determining, their self-determination lies not in transcending influences but in integrating influences. Even freedom is freedom-in-relation. To think nondualistically is to recognize the radically relational character of all existents and thus to move beyond the many dualisms that characterize so much of patriarchal Christianity.

The emphasis of process theology on nondualistic thinking has implications even for the way in which thinking is conceived, if by *thinking* we mean reason and if by *reason* we mean discursive reason. Among the many dualisms that process theologians propose to overcome in a postpatriarchal Christianity is that between reason and feeling. In the West, reason has often been conceived as a solely cognitive activity, independent of, rather than dependent upon, feeling. It has been presumed that (*a*) rational thought is a non-

affective activity, devoid of passion, intuition, or emotion, and (*b*) feeling and emotion have no cognitive content. These presuppositions have affected the ways in which men and women are approached, because masculinity has often been identified with autonomous, rational thought and femininity with nonautonomous, vulnerable feeling.

Process theologians propose alternatives to all of these assumptions. They suggest that reason is infused with forms of feeling: whenever one reasons, one *feels* the presence of ideas and *enjoys* their clarity, or is *perplexed* by their ambiguity, or *appreciates* their aesthetic richness, or *judges* them to be false, or *intuits* their truth value. Enjoyment, perplexity, appreciation, judgment, and intuition are forms of feeling that are responsive to images and ideas. In their way, they are no less affective than feelings that are responsive to sense perception. Rational affections differ from other forms in that the data to which they are responsive are internal rather than external, mental rather than physical.

Furthermore, process theologians suggest that nondiscursive feelings—that is, feelings that are not emotional responses to abstract ideas—can have cognitive value in their own right. Consider, for example, the many feelings that accompany our perceptions of the natural world: feelings of beauty and wonder, mystery and awe, fear and delight. In an intuitive way, we learn something about nature through such feelings, even though they are not immediately responsive to intellectualized abstractions or controlled by rational processes. Consider also the feelings that absorb us in dreams, when we are open to preconscious and prereflective dimensions of experience. Here, too, we learn something about nature: the nature of our subconscious minds. A process epistemology includes more than reason among its avenues for knowing. As David Griffin explains, "human experience is not limited to sensory and conscious experience, and human knowing includes not only intellectual operations but also affective, aesthetic, symbolic, imaginal, and bodily operations, which are equally important" (Griffin 1987a, 123–36).

Griffin's description of human cognition is meant to be free from gender bias. As with all process thinkers, he believes that, for men and for women, knowing is—or can be—affective, aesthetic, symbolic, imaginal, and bodily as well as rational. A postpatriarchal Christianity emphasizes the cultivation of each and all of these forms of knowledge.

The Self as Creative, Relational, and Dynamic. Of course, human beings are more than knowers, they are *experiencers*—and there is more to

being an experiencer than knowing. There is doing, willing, hoping, trusting, fearing, dreaming, yearning, breathing, loving, remembering, forgetting, laughing, crying, and dying. Whether or not these experiences have cognitive value, they are the very content of a life as lived from the inside. They have aesthetic value (when enjoyed) even if they lack cognitive value. The question arises: What is it—or better, who is it—that suffers or enjoys these experiences? What or who is the human self? A postpatriarchal Christianity must arrive at some way of viewing the human self that is relevant to the experiences and possibilities of women and men, and here the work of one process thinker, Catherine Keller, is particularly helpful. In *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self* (1986) Keller points out that in patriarchal Christianity, as in much of the West, the self has often been construed in nonrelational, atomistic terms—as a soul cut off from the world by the boundaries of the skin or, in post-Christian settings, as a "mind" that resides in the body, separated from an "objective" world. This way of conceiving the self—as an atomized, autonomous, disembodied, unrelational substance of one sort or another—has had destructive consequences for both women and men.

For men, it has been destructive in that it has supported the ideal of complete autonomy, which has inhibited the realization of intimacy and equality. An atomistic understanding of selfhood has undergirded the idea than a man achieves authentic identity only if he is clearly distinguishable from others and from the surrounding world. The concept of the isolated ego has "codified the notion that only separation—under the banner of 'independence' and 'autonomy'—prepares the way" for authentic existence (Keller 1986, dust-jacket). Drawing from the work of Nancy Chodorow, Keller speculates that in Western societies the male's impulse for separation may stem from an early age, when boys have had to separate themselves from their mothers (Chodorow 1978). The conception of self as isolated ego may itself be a projection of the male experience of the separated self, and this can change only after the social structures have changed.

For women, the conception of self as isolated ego has also had destructive consequences, in two ways. First, as embodied by men, it has led to the view of women as "other." Of course there are important senses in which women *are* "other" in relation to men. Men must learn that each woman—and perhaps women in general—has unique values *as* a woman, values "other" than those readily realized (or realizable) by men. But the "otherness" of such values is not the otherness of an object upon whom unilateral power is

exercised, the otherness of an object to be controlled. When men have been influenced by the ideal of the autonomous self, they have approached women as objects to be controlled by that self.

The second way in which the conception of self as isolated ego has had destructive consequences for women pertains not so much to adoption of this conceptuality by men but to its adoption or (counter-adoption) by women. If the only option for conceiving of self is the isolated ego, a woman is in a double bind. On the one hand, she can be a patriarchal self, in which case she, like men, seeks to become separate from the world: an autonomous ego cut off from the world by the boundaries of her skin. On the other hand, she can think of herself in opposite and complementary terms: as an utterly relational self whose sole value lies in being of service to, and dependent on, others and whose primary ideal is self-sacrifice or selflessness. In the latter instance, which is common under patriarchal circumstances, she becomes the counterpart to the male ego: the one possessed by the possessor. Keller speaks of this counterpart as the "soluble" self, that is, the self that has been dissolved into relational bondage.

Keller recognizes that in response to the dilemmas of a soluble self, women often seem to opt for an autonomous ego. "Often we hear women say that first, or finally, they must get separate individuality and develop their own autonomy: an especially pressing motive among women coming up to breathe after long immersion in marriages, families, and disappointing love affairs" (Keller 1986, 3). From the point of view of an observer, and perhaps from the point of view of a woman, "separate individuality" can be a traditionally masculine ego pattern. But Keller does not believe that this is the aim of most women who seek autonomy. She does not believe that most women, in seeking "an empowering center in themselves and often furious at the sums of selfhood drained away in futile asymmetries, are actually repudiating connectedness." Rather, they "desire worlds—places of inner and outer freedom in which new forms of connection can take place." Their hope is that in these worlds they can "range through an unlimited array of relations—not just to other persons, but to ideas and feeling, to the earth, the body, and the untold contents of the pressing moment." In other words, "women struggling against the constraints of conventionally feminine modes of relation desire not less but more (and different) relation: not disconnection, but connection that counts" (Keller, 1986, 3).

The image of self as autonomous ego does not allow for this "connection that counts." Given the inadequacy of the image for women and for men, Keller says that "something new is needed" (Keller 1986, 4). Using process categories of thought, she offers an

alternative way of conceiving the self that eliminates the double bind for women and provides a more hopeful option for men. It is to think of the self as an ongoing, multifaceted, and ever-changing process of experiencing, each moment of which is a creative synthesis of many worlds. To understand this, let us examine figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1 illustrates the "autonomous ego" view of the self, represented by a box that has an identity (internal space) apart from its relations to its body and the environment. Those who think this way recognize that the self is conditioned by the body, by the extrabodily environment (including other people, artifacts, plants and animals, land, and the atmosphere), and by experiences. The solid lines from "environmental influences," "bodily influences," and "past experiences" represent these influences. However, at least with respect to extrabodily environment and also, perhaps, the body, advocates of the autonomous ego understand this conditioning on the analogy of two self-enclosed billiard balls colliding with a third called the self. The self they envision is not internally related to environment or the body, so that its connections with the body and environment are essential to its identity; rather, it is externally

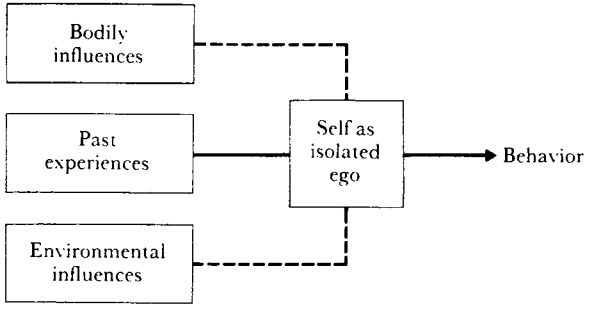

Figure 1

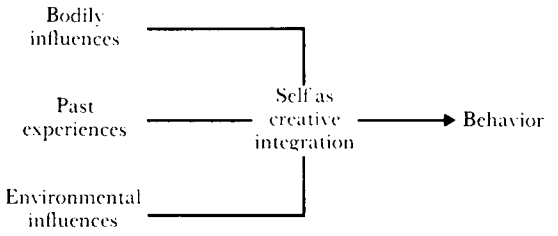

Figure 2

related to the body and environment, which is to say that it could "be what it is" even if those relations were different. The fact that "influence lines" from society and body are broken rather than solid indicates that these relations are external to the identity of the self rather than internal. In principle, the self and all its experiences could be transplanted into a new body and environment, and be the same self.

Figure 2 illustrates Keller's alternative to this way of thinking, so that the self is not self-enclosed. The lines from the body, the environment, and experiences are solid, representing the fact that the self's relations to these realities are internal to its own identity and existence. Moreover, these relations are not simply causal connections discerned by an objective observer from a third-person perspective; they are feelings enjoyed or suffered from a first-person perspective. From Keller's point of view, the self "feels" or "takes into account" body environment, and experiences both consciously and subconsciously, and thereby is "connected" with them. Not just the feelings, but the items felt, enter the self's constitution, becoming part of its identity. The environment and the body are just as much part of the self as the self's own experiences. From this perspective it would make no sense to speak of the self as transplanted into a new body and remaining unchanged in the process. In either a new body or a new world, the self is a new and different self.

To emphasize the relationality of Keller's perspective, however, is only half the story. For her as for all process thinkers, the self is not simply a synthesis of connections to body, environment, and experiences; it is a *creative* synthesis of these relations. If an omniscient observer knew all factors from the body, environment, and past that influence the self, that observer could not predict with certainty how the synthesis would occur or what the behavioral, outcome would be. In the depths of the self is an act of decision, of cutting off certain possibilities for integrating "the many into one" and thereby actualizing other possibilities. This decision, too, is part of the self. The self's creativity lies not in being independent of connections with others but in creatively determining the quality and style of that dependence. Freedom is how many influences become one self, and to be free is to be creatively dependent.

Both because the self is free yet profoundly dependent on changing circumstances, the self is fluid and dynamic. It is not a settled and static thing or entity that owns or possesses feelings and decisions; rather, it is an ongoing process of feeling and deciding from one second to the next, one minute to the next, one hour to the next, one day to the next. As soon as a moment of creative synthesis occurs, it

becomes a past experience, to be integrated by successive instances of creative synthesis. Thus a person's sense of continuity is largely a function of memory. In fact, the self can be thought of as a verb rather than a noun—a pilgrimage rather than a destination, a journey rather than a stopping place. From this perspective, one can never step into the same river twice, not because the river changes but because the self changes.

The fact that the self changes—that its very existence and identity can be different from one moment to the next—means that people can grow beyond their pasts, can become new persons. This is quite important for women and men who seek existences and identities different from those into which they have been conditioned by patriarchy. Such women and men can never be fully or absolutely disconnected from their pasts, but they can creatively integrate past influences in ways that transcend their destructive power.

Keller believes that the process model of the self is true to the nature of human existence, including women's experience. She agrees with Sheila Davaney, who writes that "the process perspective reflects and affirms the feminist understanding of women as subjects" (Davaney 1980, 4). Both agree that human subjects are creative and relational, and that the image of the self as an isolated ego is ontologically misguided.

Yet from Keller's perspective, as from that of Davaney, ontology is by no means the most important issue. A creative-relational view of the self commends itself, not simply because it approximates truth of the way things are but because it offers a promising ideal of the way things can be. The ideal is to live a life consistent with the very nature of the self: to be, and allow others to be, creatively relational. Of course, not any relations will do; they must be "connections that count" (Keller 1986, 3). Such connections involve relational rather than unilateral power, and they involve mutual care. Keller's hope—and that of a postpatriarchal Christianity—is that women and men alike can enjoy "connections that count" without discrimination on the basis of gender.

More than that, the hope is that women and men can enjoy such connections in and through healthy affirmations of their gender. Part of what must be integrated into the life of a creative and relational self is gender itself. For most of us, gender identity is partly the result of body chemistry, partly the result of social conditioning, and partly the result of decisions we have made in the past and are making in the present. How much our gender is the result of body chemistry and social conditioning is a matter of serious and important debate. However, regardless of the outcome of this debate, freedom plays a

role. At least in part, we choose what it means "to be a man" or "to be a woman." As Mary Daly's appropriation of words like *hag* and *bitch* attests, inherited meanings of *woman* can be changed by women themselves, in which case the meaning of "being a woman" changes. In the lives of an individual and a society, gender identities can evolve. Keller and other process theologians propose "new ways of being male [and] new ways of being female" that, in the immediacy of the present, we can begin to create.

Nature as Evolutionary and Ecological, but Not Mechanistic. The human self as described in the previous section is inseparable from nature. To say that it is partly free is not to suggest that the self is supernatural; it is a nonmechanistic way of conceiving nature: it sees human freedom as a sophisticated evolutionary expression of (rather than a sophistical exception to) what is happening in other animals, in living cells, and in submicroscopic matter. In a process postpatriarchal theology, as in most forms of feminist theology, other biological organisms also are creative, relational, and dynamic. The natural world is evolutionary and ecological, but not mechanistic.

The affirmation that nature is not mechanistic has important implications for a postpatriarchal religious orientation. The metaphor of the mechanistic worldview is that nature is *like a machine*, that it is like a vast assemblage of lifeless, atomized particles in motion that can and should be used exclusively for human beings. In *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, a historian of science, Carolyn Merchant, explains how this metaphor functioned in the scientific revolutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to sanction an exploitation of nature, unfettered commercial expansion, and a new socioeconomic order that subordinated women. Merchant reminds us that under the dominance of this metaphor nature was approached (in the words of Francis Bacon) as something to be "bound into service" and made a "slave." She also reminds us that much of the imagery Bacon used in stating the objectives and methods of the new science derived from witch trials of his day. Under the scrutiny of science, Bacon implied, Mother Nature is to be hounded much as witches are hounded. Both are to be subdued, interrogated, and conquered (Merchant 1985, 169).

Despite revolutions in science, the metaphor of nature as machine prevails in much science today. As Merchant puts it, "The mechanistic approach to nature is as fundamental to the twentieth-century revolution in physics as it was to classical Newtonian science" (Merchant 1985, 291). This means that contemporary science, despite its many accomplishments, often advances a way of

thinking that has a destructive effect on human and nonhuman life. Illustrative of this destruction is the fact that 100 to 200 million animals die each year in laboratories around the world, often under conditions of severe stress and pain, with litle protest from the global scientific community (Ryder 1985, 79). The animals are dispatched, in part, because they are viewed as machines that can be "bound into service" for human ends. Thus science plays no small role in encouraging a mechanistic understanding of life.

Like every process theologian, Merchant believes there is a viable and socially necessary alternative to the machine metaphor, that the human future—and that of the earth and all its creatures—may depend on our learning to see and think of nature as a *living organism* rather than a *machine* (Merchant 1985, 289). She points to the philosophy of Whitehead as an important example of what it might mean in a contemporary context to understand nature organically rather than mechanistically, and it is by this Whiteheadian alternative that process postpatriarchal theologies are shaped.

Although advocating an organic rather than a mechanistic understanding of nature, process theologies are by no means antiscientific. Indeed, they are deeply influenced by (among other things) evolutionary thinking. From astrophysicists and cosmologists, process theologians have learned to affirm, and to integrate into a religious orientation, the idea that the universe is the result of a 10 to 15 billion-year process of cosmic evolution that continues, and from evolutionary biologists they have learned to affirm, and again integrate into their religious orientation, the idea that life is also the result of an evolutionary process that continues into the present. Moreover they recognize, with several speculative physicists, that there may well be other forms of life on other planets surrounding other stars, and they insist, as do most biologists, that even in terms of life on earth there is no reason to assume that human life is the exclusive aim or goal of the biological process. A process postpatriarchal Christianity recognizes that humans are by no means the sole locus of value, or the sole end, of cosmic and terrestrial evolutionary developments. All living beings, not just human beings, have intrinsic value.

In addition to evolutionary theories, process theology is influenced by quantum mechanics and relativity theories in physics, by ecology and cognitive ethology in biology, and by thermodynamics in physical chemistry. Indeed, most process theologians submit that a dialogue between religion and science, in which religious perspectives are partially shaped by insights from science, is essential to the future of religion. Postpatriarchal Christianity must be scientifically informed.

Yet the dialogue with science is, and must be, both ways. Even as postpatriarchal Christians learn from science, they must be critical of the mechanistic worldview by which much science is motivated. The argument of process thinkers such as John Cobb and the biologist Charles Birch is that science can proceed in terms of, and indeed be advanced by, an alternative "organic" worldview such as that proposed by Whitehead. Science would thereby contribute more richly to the liberation of life that is sorely needed in our time.

For life to be liberated, process theologians believe, the very concept of life must be liberated from the mechanistic interpretation (Birch and Cobb 1981; Griffin 1987a). In a process context, *mechanistic* refers to one or a combination of five perspectives: (1) deterministic, in which happenings are understood to be caused by powers from the past; (2) utilitarian in which value is understood to be instrumental rather than intrinsic; (3) devitalized, in which the depths of physical matter are understood to be lifeless and inert rather than lifelike and creative; (4) reductionistic, in which living wholes are understood to be reducible to nonliving parts; and (5) dualistic, in which a sharp line is drawn between spirit and matter, supernatural and natural, mind and body, thought and feeling, and self and world. To say that nature is like a machine is to think in terms of one or several of these points of view.

The organic worldview advocated by process thinkers stresses alternative ideas, some of which include insights from mechanisms that run counter to mechanistic perspectives. Process thinkers emphasize (1) that present happenings are the result not only of causative powers from the past but come about from creative impulses in the present that are guided by final causes from the future. This means that nonhuman organisms, such as human beings, are partially creative and, hence, partially unpredictable in the ways they respond to and integrate environmental and bodily influences. In addition, process thinkers propose (2) that nonhuman organisms (from living cells to porpoises) are of intrinsic value in and for themselves, even as they are of instrumental importance to others, (3) that physical matter is more alive than dead in its ultimate depths, (4) that living wholes, such as the human self or an animal psyche, are very much influenced by (and yet more than) the parts of which they are composed, and (5) that reality, although in many respects pluralistic and manifold in its domains and dimensions, is better characterized as interdependent and interfusing than as dualistic and dichotomized. In the latter respect, a process understanding of nature is very similar to a Buddhist orientation. For process thinkers

as for Buddhists, nature is a seamless web of interdependent realities, which includes ourselves.

It is important to note that some scientists—David Bohm in physics, for example, Ilya Prigogine in physical chemistry, and Donald Griffin in biology—have adopted aspects of an organic orientation. This suggests that the concept of nature in science may be changing in ways intimated by process thinkers. It is precisely this kind of creative transformation in science that should parallel creative transformation in religion. A postpatriarchal Christianity can best be complemented by a postpatriarchal—that is, a post mechanistic—science.

God as Heart. Women and men seeking liberation from male rule are no less part of living nature and evolution than other living beings, whether human or nonhuman. They, like other creatures, are drawn by goals or purposes for living with some satisfaction relative to the situation at hand; in postpatriarchal Christians, the situation at hand is of course patriarchy. The goal is to live with greater satisfaction than has been available under patriarchy. Christians and others rightly name this satisfaction *shalom*—that dynamic and relational peace that is the fullness of life in relation to other people, nonhuman nature, and the divine spirit.

The five characteristics of postpatriarchal Christianity (mentioned above) are strategies for achieving an approximation of *shalom*. They are also the characteristics that might sustain *shalom* once it is approximated. Our assumption is that *shalom* can be approached and sustained if Christians and others (1) begin to embody value-pluralistic thinking and its care; (2) begin to cherish and embody relational more than unilateral power; (3) cultivate nondualistic thinking and realize its inseparability from feeling; (4) see the self as creative and relational rather than as isolated ego; and (5) appreciate, with the help of a postmechanistic science, the natural world as organic and evolutionary.

The hope for *shalom* is not a hope for eternal life. Indeed, a characteristic of most feminist theologies is that they advocate acceptance of finitude, and perhaps this is as it should be, for even if *shalom* is approximate, human lives in particular and human life in general will not extend into the indefinite future. In all likelihood the human species, like all species, will eventually become extinct, either before or when the energy of the sun is exhausted. The quest for postpatriarchal existence is not for existence beyond finitude, but for quality of existence amid finitude.

What motivates this quest? Many, of course, are motivated by the

necessity of finding an alternative to situations under patriarchy to escape suffering. But process theologians suggest something else: people are also motivated by the possibility of *shalom* within their subjective experience. It is as if, within all people is a beckoning light, a small voice that calls them beyond the person they have been (and perhaps beyond the person society tells them they ought to be) toward the person they can be if they are true to themselves. The metaphorical *light* and *voice* refer to an attractant within each person, lure toward self-actualization (including gender affirmation) in community with other people, with nonhuman nature, and with the divine spirit. This lure is also present in nonhuman life; it is that power by which nonhuman organisms live from moment to moment with some satisfaction relative to *their* situations. From a process perspective, this lure is God, or at least one aspect of God.

Feminists who are influenced by process theology disagree on whether the word God can be used in a postpatriarchal Christian setting. For some—Rita Nakashima Brock and Catherine Keller, for example—the word is too tainted with images of an exclusively masculine deity, or a cosmic moralist, or an all-powerful autocrat to be useful. For others—Marjorie Suchocki and Nancy Howell, for example—the word is still helpful and at present, indispensable for naming the sacred reality (Suchocki 1982; Howell 1988). But all agree that the sacred reality is not exclusively male, nor is it a cosmic moralist or an all-powerful autocrat. They also agree that whether or not the world God is used, new and different words are needed to name the sacred reality, words such as lover and friend, light and life, mother and daughter, water and fire, earth and eros. Christians and others are at a stage in which experimentation in naming and describing God is required and in which, for some, the word God must be abandoned.

Amid this experimentation, a word that may be helpful (and upon which we shall focus) is Heart. In a postpatriarchal context, the divine mystery can be named, and felt, as Heart. In postpatriarchal process theologies, the word Heart has been used most systematically and creatively by Rita Nakashima Brock (1988), who uses it to refer not to the Divine but to relational power as enjoyed and exercised by humans. She speaks of patriarchy as being brokenhearted and of postpatriarchy as a yearning for and internalization of relational power, or heart. Because in process theology the divine mystery is the most inclusive example of relation power, Heart—with an uppercase *H*—can name this mystery.

The word Heart is meant to complement and enrich other words traditionally used in process theology to name the divine mystery,

words such as mind, consciousness, subject, and self. In process theology, God is described as a cosmic, omnipresent Subject who feels and responds to worldly events as they occur and whose subjectivity is an ever-changing yet ever-constant creative integration of worldly events. In this sense, God is a Self who includes and is affected by all selves. Just as a human self creatively integrates bodily influences so that what happens in the body happens in the self, the divine Self creatively integrates everything that happens in the universe so that what happens in the universe happens in the divine Self. God is the mind of the universe, it has been said, and the universe is the body of God.

The mind-body analogy has distinct advantages over patriarchal ways of thinking about God. The latter have often focused on metaphors such as parent-child (particularly father-child) or artisan-artifact (creator-created) that stress a mutual externality between God and the world. In *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (1987), Sallie McFague shows how destructive these metaphors can be, because they can wrongly suggest that all power lies with a creator God and that what happens in the world need not affect this God unless "he" chooses to be affected. As McFague makes clear, for a postpatriarchal and postmechanistic religious orientation the mind-body analogy can rightly suggest that God and the world are related through mutual dependence and creativity.

Still, as Brock points out, the mind-body analogy may have disadvantages if "mind" suggests reason divorced from feeling or thought divorced from care. In this case the word mind is too cold, too masculine, too oriented toward Logos at the expense of Eros, too patriarchal. Naming God *Heart* can complement, if not replace, the language of God as mind. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, *heart* "means mind in the widest sense, including the functions of feeling and volition as well as intellect" (1970, 159). The intentions of process thought can be better realized if we speak of God as the Heart of the universe, and universe as the body of this Heart.

The word *heart* has additional meanings and associations that tell us something about the Divine as understood in a process context. One meaning is "center of vital functions" or "seat of life" or "life itself." For example, when we say that "our hearts were gladdened" by good news or "our heart was in our hands", we mean our innermost being by "heart," the center of our lives, our life itself. In a process context, the divine lure is the seat of life, in the sense of being that within each human (and nonhuman) by which the will to live with satisfaction and wholeness is elicited. It is no accident that at the interface of theology and biology John Cobb and Charles Birch speak

of the divine mystery as the Life (with an uppercase *L*) by which all other lives (with a lowercase *l*) are enlivened (1981, 183–202). To speak of the divine mystery as Heart is to highlight its connection with life.

A second meaning of heart is "center" or "core" or "middle." We speak of "getting to the heart of the matter," and by this we mean getting to the center of an issue, the middle of it. As a metaphor for God, Heart in this sense suggests that the divine mystery is at the core or center of the universe, and of life itself, rather than above or outside. This need not imply that the divine mystery is not in some ways transcendent. Indeed, from a process perspective the mystery *is* transcendent. It is a relational Self—with consciousness, purposes, creativity, and care—that includes all selves. Yet this Self is within us, in the center of our lives, rather than outside or external to us. We experience divine transcendence not so much as external authority over us but as an inexhaustible font of possibilities within us: a wellspring of potentialities by which, if we are creatively responsive, our lives (and those of others) are fulfilled. Sin misses the mark of responding to these possibilities, missing the mark of responding to God within us. God within us is the Heart of our hearts.

A third way the word heart is used is to refer to feelings of sympathy, understanding, compassion, and care. We speak of caring people as "full of heart," and by this we mean that they have deep love and affection for others. For process thinkers the divine mystery is heartful in this sense, and in two ways. The cosmic Heart is active in the world as a lure, which is one way its love is expressed; it is also receptive of the world as an all-empathetic consciousness, which is the other way its love is realized. It is bipolar, both yin and yang. In its bipolarity, Heart is the ultimate expression of relational power. It is potentially the most influential power in the universe, although its influence depends on worldly response; and it is the most vulnerable power in the universe. In the latter respect, Heart feels the feelings of living beings, suffering their sufferings, enjoying their joys, sharing in their destinies in ways much deeper than we can imagine. Moreover, it does all this in a pluralistic way. Its empathy is responsive to each life on the latter's terms: to the amoeba on its terms, to the herring gull on its terms, and to a human on her or his terms. The divine mystery is "all heart," not only because it is imbued with empathy but because it is also receptive of diversity. It is the Heart that includes all hearts.

Inasmuch as it is responsive to living beings on their own terms and humans are among the beings to which it is responsive, the divine Heart is personal as well as transpersonal. It can be referred to as He

or She, as well as It. (I have used *it* to avoid gender bias, but the language of He or She can be used as well.) In different contexts and for different people, either or both words may be meaningful. For some, the image of a tender, caring father—the *Abba* addressed by Jesus—can be helpful (fathers, too, can have hearts.) For many post-patriarchal Christians, however, She may be more appropriate than He, given the history of patriarchal God-language in the West. In fact, the divine Heart bears much greater resemblance to the creative and relational self envisioned by feminists such as Catherine Keller than to the autonomous ego exemplified, in most characters portrayed by Sylvester Stallone. God is much more like Shug Avery in *The Color Purple* than She is like Rambo. She is strong, but her strength is tender and it lies in being creatively relational rather than absolutely independent. For those who have been oppressed by patriarchal imagery or who have used such imagery to oppress others, the divine spirit is best conceived not as a father "who art in heaven" but, as Sallie McFague suggests, as a mother, lover, or friend.

For process thinkers, the life well lived is open to the divine Heart. Openness of this sort is faith, and an art rather than a science. It involves trust in a Presence who cannot be manipulated or exhausted by conceptual formulas or religious doctrines. The fruits of openness include value-pluralistic thinking, care for others, hunger for justice, relational power, a union of thought and feeling, discovery of one's self as creatively integrative, appreciation of nature as organic and evolutionary, and reverence for life. It is the hope of process theologians that the religions of the world, Christianity included, can evolve into traditions that nourish and encourage these fruits. Of course they also hope that all religions, each in its own way, can become postpatriarchal. Postpatriarchal theologies within Christianity are a sign that such a transformation can occur.

In this paper I have explained the nature and function of postpatriarchal theology and I have illustrated one version of it: a process postpatriarchal perspective. In fact, in Christianity and elsewhere many versions of postpatriarchal theologies are needed—some created by women, some by men, and some created jointly. If such changes in religious self-understanding are to influence society, they must be complemented and enriched by new ways of thinking in other sectors of society, including scientific communities. In our time the lure of the divine Heart is toward new, imaginative visions that elicit compassion as well as understanding. "Where there is no vision," the Bible tells us, "the people perish." The question of our age is whether such vision will emerge in time to stem the tides of

ecological destruction, social injustice, and war. It is good for us, and for God, that the future is open to new vision.

NOTES

1. For an example of a philosophical ethic centered in care, see Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1984).

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