

- “Panentheist Internalism: Living within the Presence of the Trinitarian God,” *Dialog* 40 (2001): 208-15.

**Panentheist Internalism:  
Living within the Presence of the Trinitarian God:  
Dialog #3**

**Philip Clayton**

*Panentheism* is the view that the world is contained within God, although God is also more than the world as a whole. In two earlier articles in *Dialog*, I have defended panentheism as a viable form of Christian theology.<sup>1</sup> Today I wish to advance that discussion further, responding to objections and extending the panentheistic logic deeper into constructive Christian theology.

Of course, there is the risk that in attempting to respond to objections one will only evoke new ones — the proverbial problem of producing the rope to hang oneself with! But it is worth the risk. Panentheism represents a very major opportunity for Christian theologians, pastors, and lay people: if it be friend, its resources should be made broadly available for use by all three groups; and if it be foe, its heretical dangers should be exposed as soon as possible by its critics, lest the innocent be led astray.

**Internalist and externalist theologies**

There was a time when gods were needed to explain surprising or unusual events in the natural order. Increasingly, though, the choice became one between theism and naturalism or materialism. Interventionist theists maintain that God is needed to explain each of the transitions in the natural order: not only creation, but the origin of life — and indeed of each species, if not each organism — requires a divine intervention to explain its occurrence. If God were not imparting motion and life to the universe, nothing would live or move. Naturalists, by contrast, challenge the need for, and even the possibility of, divine interventions. On their view, biological principles are sufficient to explain the birth of individuals, the evolution of species, and perhaps even the transition from complex but inanimate chemical structures to the most simple living structures. For materialists, the universe consists of matter, energy and laws alone. Energy doesn't have to be added from the outside; the universe is self-explanatory.

Panentheism adds a new element into the mix with its distinction between “internal” and “external” ways of conceiving God. Panentheists maintain that the model of a God who exists outside the physical order that he created and who intervenes into it as necessary to carry out his physical or salvific purposes is mistaken. We note that, as the holes in the human knowledge of

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<sup>1</sup> See “The Case for Christian Panentheism,” *Dialog* 37 (Summer 1998): 201-208. Four theologians commented on this proposal in *Dialog* 38 (Summer 1999), to which I responded in “A Response to My Critics” in the same issue, pp. ???-??.

the natural world have gotten smaller, there is less and less for an external God to do. Worse, until the modern period there was no reason to understand the natural order as closed; it even seemed *necessary* for God to be outside the world in order to introduce motion into it. But the entire system of physical knowledge today presupposes that the physical order is closed (the principle of the conservation of energy), and none of the predictions would work if it isn't. Not only does an external God have less to do (because less is unexplained), but the things that God might still do — such as causing the resurrection of Jesus — seem to be excluded by the closedness of the natural order.

At the same time that science seems to be closing the door to traditional accounts of divine action, it has begun to open another one. Matter seems to have a propensity to self-organization. Because of its inherent qualities it forms itself into increasingly complex systems. As the complexity increases, these systems begin to display new qualities that were not present at earlier stages. New and progressively more amazing things emerge: self-reproducing cells, organisms that adapt more and more miraculously to their environments over time, highly complex social behaviors, and finally conscious beings — animals capable of formulating symbolic systems that refer far into the past and future, creating imaginary worlds and transforming the present one.

To put it simply: under the externalist model the creativity and goal-directedness has to come from the outside, to be introduced by God into the system *de novo*. Under the internalist model, the divine creativity manifests itself *inside* the system. It appears to be an inherent property of this natural order for it to evolve creatively into what we most value: conscious beings who think, will, judge ... and raise the question of their ultimate origin.

### **The panentheist wager**

If this were an essay on theology and science, we would have to spend much more time on the details of recent theories of self-organization and emergence. They represent an important new scientific paradigm that alters the context within which we do theology. But if we spend all our time on scientific credibility we will never get to the theology. So I propose that we simply presuppose this shift for the time being and move directly to its theological implications.

We have seen that advances in science have tended to close the door on the view of God as the one who brings about this dance of creativity and emergence from outside. But is the door therefore closed to all theology? No: the concepts of emergence and self-organization within the created order now allow theologians to give an account which, I hope to show, is consistent with the Christian tradition and scriptures. The importance of walking through this open door becomes more visible when one considers the alternative. Imagine that one were to say instead, "All right, I draw my line in the sand *here*: either God influences the process of evolution by individual interventions into the natural process, or else the process of evolution has nothing to do with God."<sup>2</sup> By placing one's entire wager on this one strategy, one makes the intellectual viability of Christianity vulnerable to a possible outcome of science: the success of evolutionary explanations of life. If human study does in fact show that matter organizes itself (given sufficient time) into life and mind, then the one who wagers this way has left no place for God to

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, the process, and the universe, might still have been initiated by God in the beginning. But if this were the only intervention, the resulting theology would amount to deism rather than the theism that Christianity needs.

be relevant to that outcome.<sup>3</sup> I fear that the anti-evolutionist wing of Christianity today is making precisely this unwise wager.

Recognizing that theology stands before such a possibly disastrous outcome helps motivate the wager in the other direction. What if — so the panentheist wager goes — God does not intervene *into* the natural processes, but rather is already in them? What if the processes of nature *just are* God at work? This theological approach allows us to take the qualities that we find in nature — the creativity, beauty, order, and lawfulness — and to ascribe them to the agency of God. But we can only do this if we learn how to think God and the world together more closely than theism has traditionally done.<sup>4</sup> Theologians today need to see how the resources of our tradition allow us to think natural processes *as* divine acts. And the only way to do this is to remove the ontological gap between God and these processes.

Of course we cannot *equate* God with the processes of nature, since God must remain their source and Creator. It may well be that a number of “New Age” authors go this far, making the parts of nature, or Nature herself, divine. But Christianity is not identical to pantheism, since it is committed to preserving an ontological distinction between the world and God as two different orders of being. How this distinction is to be thought, and not whether there should be *some* distinction between God and world, represents our major task in these pages. Let us look briefly at some of the distinctions in philosophical theology, and at some distinctions in function and ability, before moving on to the trinitarian resources for distinguishing God and world within the context of panentheism.

*The distinctions in philosophical theology.* It is the nature of God to exist necessarily. God is contingent on nothing outside Godself. God did not have to create and could not cease to exist. No matter how intimately involved God becomes with creation, and no matter how deeply God loves it and sacrifices on its behalf, it remains true that the world might not exist and is held in existence at each moment by the divine will.

For its part, this difference is an expression of several other distinctions. The created order is finite — in size (as we now know), but also in its very nature. By contrast, God is infinite in God’s very nature, an important fact to which we return below. Unlike God, who is essentially eternal, created things are limited in duration: time is essential to our very being. It follows from our essentially temporal nature that we are mutable to our core. That is, it lies in our very being to be in constant change — so much so that the existentialist philosopher Jean Paul Sartre suggested that human essence is not pre-given but is created in and through the process of our existence. By contrast, God is essentially immutable. This doesn’t mean, as process theologians have now shown us, that God can’t directly know or be involved with human history; but it does mean that God’s essential nature is not liable to change in the flow of this history. For example, God is essentially good — goodness lies in the divine nature — whereas goodness is something that we humans develop (or fail to develop!) in the course of our life and experience.

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<sup>3</sup> Except, of course, as the initial force that set the natural process in motion — but that is probably not enough for Christianity.

<sup>4</sup> The reasons for the sharp distinction had to do with threats to Israelite and early Christian theism that no longer constitute threats in our day. See Clayton, *God and Contemporary Science* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), chapter 2.

*The distinctions in function and ability.* I began with essences, as one ought to, since they have a certain priority over all else. But the functional differences in the roles of God and finite beings must be added as well. First and foremost is the order of creation. Just as children will always have a unique relationship to their parents, no matter how far apart they may drift or how the individuals may subsequently act, so the relationship of created beings to their Creator remains unchanged in the course of cosmic history. We derived (and continuously derive) our being from the One who is the Ground of all being, and that relationship of derivation continues to distinguish us from God even if, as pantheism holds, creation occurs within the divine being itself.

As Creator, God also serves as the ultimate source of regularity and order. Where there is pattern or lawfulness in the world, it reflects the world's dependence on the divine. By contrast, when we humans create order — or live well-ordered lives — we imitate the One who first established order. Likewise, God functions as the moral ideal for all created beings. As *ens perfectissimum*, God represents the ideal of perfection toward which all else strives. Here again, our role is to be imitators: the highest thing that we can do in our small sphere of influence is to imitate, and thus participate in, the One who is Goodness itself. Finally, God is the ultimate originator of creativity. Theologians have long recognized that the teeming creativity of the natural order reflects the creative drive of its Creator. Is this not the core insight of the argument from design, the so-called teleological proof of the existence of God? Even if the philosophical proofs are not logically persuasive, they still reflect an ineliminable theological insight: that in every creative act that we author, we are in one sense merely expressing in our own small way the creative drive built into the universe as a whole, which is in the end an expression of the creativity of its Creator.

### **The doctrine of God and world**

I suggest that these sorts of differences (along with the trinitarian differences, to which we return in a moment) are sufficient to preserve the divinity of God. It is not necessary to add more. Thus it is not necessary to locate the creation outside of God.

Two principles should guide the development of a theology of God and world. On the one hand, the perfection of God must be preserved: God's actions must remain just. God can never become morally equivalent — equivalent in degree of goodness — to the creation. On the other hand, the love of God cannot be compromised. There must be the sort of genuine involvement with the world that allows for God to know its suffering and need, and to respond to that need with a compassion that is wise, self-involving, even self-sacrificial. Goodness cannot affect the world if it holds itself aloof, avoiding the sort of engagement that alone can be redemptive.

Unfortunately, for most of its history theology has done rather better at formulating radical doctrines of the justice of God than it has at comprehending the radical compassion of God. Anselm's complicated juridical scheme in *Cur Deus homo* brilliantly preserved the justice of God, but at the cost of making his love less than fully visible. Calvin's *Institutes*, one of the most logically consistent theologies ever written, also errs in this direction, with unrelenting justice somehow trumping the scope of salvific love. Thomas Aquinas, who genuinely sought to balance both, was hobbled by his Aristotelian theory of knowledge and by a metaphysics of perfection that identified goodness with immutability. As a result, he allowed God to know the world only through the forms of worldly things located in the mind of God, rather than knowing material things through their ever-changing "accidental" qualities. A God who directly responded to the world at some point would be different after that point than before, hence

changing, hence imperfect. But, unfortunately, a God who cannot respond to the world cannot show genuine compassion toward it either.

It was, arguably, only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the staggering requirements which divine love places on the doctrine of God begin to sink in. Hegel had brought history-based thinking to the center of European intellectual attention; Christian theologians then played a crucial role in freeing the theory of history from the burden of rational necessity and in developing a notion of historical contingency (thanks in no small part to the doctrines of grace and the freedom of God). Building on the centrality of history, Barth and Pannenberg were then able to lift *Heilsgeschichte* and *Universalgeschichte* respectively (salvation history and universal history) to a central place within the doctrines of God and the God-world relationship. In particular, Karl Barth's elaboration of the doctrines of divine covenant and the love of God added new depth and sensitivity to these two concepts. Later in the century process, liberation and feminist theologians developed (in my opinion, for the first time) an adequate understanding of the responsiveness of God to creation.

But it is Jürgen Moltmann who will perhaps be remembered as the one who thought the doctrine of God's love through to its logical completion. In *The Crucified God*<sup>5</sup> Moltmann conceived Jesus' death on the cross as expressing the actual death of God; and he movingly described this act as one of God's *own* self-sacrifice, rather than primarily as the Father's choice to sacrifice the Son for the sake of redemption and the Son's obedience to the Father. Now it is no longer the Son's sacrifice in order to satisfy the demands for justice on the part of the Father, but rather the love of God "even unto death," that moves to the center of Christian theology.

### **The agency of God**

Philosophical theologians have also contributed in an important way ("for once!" I can hear some readers retort) to rethinking the doctrine of God's relationship to the world in light of the miracle of divine love. The last few decades have for example seen a fusion of process concepts with more traditional theologies.<sup>6</sup> Under such views God's divinity is not compromised by God's knowledge of and involvement with human imperfection and fickleness. Moving the contingency of human history into the center of their work, some theologians have begun to question the traditional focus on divine foreknowledge, so that they now entertain the possibility that God has limited God's own omniscience, and thus the extension of the divine power, in order to enter more fully into relation with finite creatures. I understand these revisions to be part of a growing realization that if we are to refer to God as an agent (or, better, three agents who co-express the divine essence) we must not ascribe qualities to God incompatible with agency. Agents have dispositions and intentions; they are genuinely related to others and are influenced by those whom they perceive; they carry out actions in time and space. You would understand panentheism correctly if you understood it as an effort to think God's agency in a rigorously consistent fashion, while yet preserving the Godhood of God.

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<sup>5</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> See, among many others, Joseph Bracken, S.J., and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, eds., *Trinity in Process: A Relational Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 1997) and the works by Bracken cited in note 10 below.

But if we are to impute agency to God, certainly analogies with human agency must be allowed. None of these analogies make God human; we already emphasized the essential disanalogies between God and humanity above. And of course we still know that *all* human language about God is, well, just that: human — useful in our ongoing process of attempting to describe the self-revealing God, but not ultimately adequate to fully comprehend the divine nature.

Here's the principle, then: we pay the "costs" of using the term "agent" or "person" not because these terms are ultimately accurate in expressing the infinite nature of the divine, but rather because they are *less inadequate* than the alternatives. The greatest goal of theology is to keep chipping away at the inadequacy of our language in the face of its Object, knowing all the while that we will never ultimately succeed. That's what leads us to apply the language of agency to God. Still, even theologians have to use terms in a consistent fashion, clearly acknowledging the implications of their terms. If God is an agent and "agent" implies "having a will," then we must assert that God has a will. Of course, we can then hasten to add what kind of a will it can and cannot be, peeling away any purely human connotations as best we can. Here, once again, theologians have been perhaps too concerned with purity, in this case the purity of God language. It is always possible to remain silent. But if one speaks, one can only use the words that are available. Since there is no alternative to using concepts based on human experience, let's do what we must do and do it well. To paraphrase Luther: Speak boldly, that understanding may abound.

How do we as agents act? We have dispositions and wishes; we form intentions and will things; and these mental states (intending, willing and the like) are mediated through our brain to our mouths, eyes, limbs, etc. If God is correctly conceived as agent, how would God act? Here I can see only two alternatives. On the one — the traditional or "externalist" theological account — God is a purely spiritual being; as such he (to use the traditional pronoun) lives outside of the physical realm he created, intervening into it from the spiritual place in which he resides. Of course, no scientific or other argument can deny this possibility, since God is the source of the created order in the first place. But it does wreak havoc on natural regularities, since God has to set aside his own laws to work miracles of this sort. Externalist approaches also make God a sort of being so different from ourselves that we can have little to no understanding of his nature, his relation to the world, and the manner of his acting.

On the other alternative (the pantheistic or "internalist" alternative), God as an agent is related to the world as his body. Every event in the world is understood as a divine act. Those events that occur with strong regularity, such as the lawlike events that physicists study, are a form of autonomic divine action, like the breathing and blood circulation that our bodies carry out without conscious direction.<sup>7</sup> But in other cases God chooses to exercise a conscious influence on events, similar to the intentional actions that we can engage in. For pantheism no special "interventionist" problems are raised by intentional divine action. God can for example consciously choose to influence the thoughts or intentions of a person without in any way breaking natural law or setting aside the divinely established natural order. (Of course, within this basic framework, pantheists may differ on how often this occurs, how direct or clear the divine voice will be, or how far down the scale toward physics intentional divine action occurs, e.g. could it affect the evolution of biological organisms?) I have developed an account of

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<sup>7</sup> The account in this paragraph was first worked out in conjunction with Steven Knapp of Johns Hopkins University.

pantheistic divine action in earlier articles (see references above) and will not repeat it here.

Some concepts appear across the theological spectrum, such as the metaphors of Creator and creation, or God as parent to living things as God's offspring. But other metaphors are unique to one or another account of God's relationship to and action in the world. Karl Barth, for example, used the picture of the lightning bolt as an externalist metaphor for divine action: God intervenes into the world "vertically from above" (*senkrecht von oben*) like a bolt of lightning, and in this fashion brings about his purposes. By contrast, the dominant metaphor of internalist pantheism is the body of God.<sup>8</sup> On this view, nature is not like a machine that runs; it is like a body, a living thing. It is of the essence of the natural world to express the will of the One who infuses it — sometimes through nature's lawfulness, and sometimes through the responsiveness of individual beings to their Creator. Take away the Spirit that indwells it, and you don't have nature any longer.

### **An aside on ministry and practical theology**

Perhaps I will be forgiven for inserting an aside on Christian ministry into an essay on systematic theology (or perhaps you feel that such asides should occur much more often!). I have found that the pantheistic metaphor of the body of God is remarkably effective in working with long-term churchgoers as well as with visitors and seekers. The biggest fear, I suppose, is that it would lead churchgoers to reduce God to a sort of New Age concept, for example to *Brahman*, the pantheist spirit of the Vedas and Upanishads, or to the feeling one has walking in a redwood forest. But this fear is misplaced. "The body of God" in pantheism is a *theological* metaphor, a way of evoking the nature of the loving God of the scriptures and Christian tradition. As I tried to argue above, the metaphor reduces the difference between God and world without abolishing it. Most importantly, it provides a remarkable access to the core beliefs about the self-revealing God, since it says to church members, "Look, the same one who is revealed in the beauty and order of nature (autonomic divine action) is also *at home* in that world. In God this world and all of us in it 'live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28). In fact, nature is not a separate order at all; it is so permeated with the divine spirit that it simply cannot be comprehended without it. And this One who permeates nature and makes it what it is has also acted out of love to communicate with humanity — and continues to act in that manner through conscious divine action even today, yet in a manner fully consistent with modern science."

We should nonetheless not overlook the influence of non-Western spiritual traditions. Over the past few decades various areas of Christian practice have been enriched by innovations from other religious traditions, and particularly from the East. Forms of meditation, chanted and sung prayer, yoga, Thai Chi, and other disciplines of movement bring an attunement of mind and body. A similar borrowing has arisen within the environmental movement, where spiritualities based on a sense of oneness with the world and with other living things play an increasingly important role. Certainly in our society forms of practice such as these hold a strong attraction for larger and larger numbers of people. Even in conservative and evangelical circles today such practices are often not seen as inconsistent with Christian spirituality.

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<sup>8</sup> Grace Jantzen and Sallie McFague have beautifully developed this metaphor in their theologies. See Jantzen, *God's World, God's Body* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984); and McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

Practices carry with them assumptions, of course. Meditation assumes that the calming and focusing of the mind and spirit can increase one's receptivity to the divine. Yoga, along with other spiritual practices that involve the body, challenges dualism in all its forms. Dualist practices traditionally privilege the spirit as the meeting place with God, dismissing the body and its states as irrelevant or as a distraction. Likewise, earth-centered spiritualities presuppose a stronger view of God's presence in natural things. On each of these views, objects and bodies are not just incidental means for reflecting the divine glory to human beings; they are themselves manifestations of the divine presence and take on an additional value as manifestations of the divine. Surely we should not choose a theological position because we like the spiritual practices that it tends to support. Still, on a pastoral level it is perhaps not insignificant that panentheism enjoys a natural fit with the spiritualities of environmental sensitivity and non-dualist approaches to mind and body.

### **The trinitarian distinction**

Above I emphasized the contrast between approaches to soteriology that focus on the perfection and justice of God (Anselm, Calvin), and those that focus on the love of God, noting that goodness cannot affect the world if it holds itself aloof, avoiding the sort of engagement that alone can be redemptive. In this context I mentioned Jürgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God*, with its radical affirmation of God dying on the cross. Moltmann's theology does seem to move more deeply into the mystery of divine love than do theories of the Son's sacrifice on the cross to satisfy the demands for justice on the part of the Father.

But, you might respond, is there really such a deep difference between the approaches of (say) Anselm and Moltmann? Certainly the Anselmian model still allows for gratitude to the Son for his self-sacrificial choice. Does not Wolfhart Pannenberg make this choice, or something like it, the center of his doctrine of the Trinity?<sup>9</sup> In the inner-trinitarian relations the Son eternally offers himself to the Father, the Father eternally accepts the offering, and the Spirit glorifies both the accepting love of the Father and the self-giving love of the Son.

Just as it supplies a different metaphor for understanding the God-world relation, so panentheism also brings a different metaphorical emphasis to discussions of the Trinity. Here the central ideas are participation, embracing presence, and redemption in and through the one whole, rather than redemption as making that which is not God to be more Godlike. Historically, humanity first knew God's love for the world by God's free decision to create. What God created was not outside of God but remained inside the divine, permeated by the divine. Here is a deep mystery: all is God, hence in one sense all actions are God's; yet we too are agents — made in the image of God, free, moral, and responsible. On this view, there is room within the one overarching divine presence and causality for independent units of activity to arise and to exercise a relative autonomy.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Pannenberg first develops these notions in *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie*, vol. 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1984); see my commentary on these (untranslated) articles in "The God of History and the Presence of the Future," *Journal of Religion* 65 (1985): 98-108. They receive the fullest treatment in the Trinity chapter of his *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> For the details of this theory I follow Joseph Bracken; see especially his *Society and Spirit: A Trinitarian Cosmology* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1991). See also

What is true of the doctrine of the God-world relation is true even more of the inner-trinitarian relations. The former comes first in the order of knowledge and is easier to understand; the latter comes first in the order of being. As we are separate agents and yet still caught up within the one divine presence, so the three divine persons are separate centers of activity which together constitute the unity of the trinitarian God. Panentheism finds an analog to God's own interpersonal relations in the relationship between God and world, just as it finds an analog to God's relationship to the world in our own relationships to our bodies.

The point is important; let me try a second formulation. Traditional trinitarians accept that Father, Son and Spirit enjoy an equal participation in the divine nature, since each participates in the one Godhead. Then, at some point, God chose to create a world outside himself. By contrast, panentheist trinitarians support a participation of the created order in God in a manner that is at least analogous to the co-participation of Father, Son and Spirit in the one Godhead.

Of course, again, *every* analogy used in understanding God must also be negated as soon as it is applied to God. Panentheistic trinitarianism recognizes three central disanalogies. First, the three divine persons who constitute the divine unity are divine in their very nature. The distinctions between the divine essence and human essence that we explored above hold for our relations to *each* of the divine persons. Thus our participation within the divine presence is not due to our nature but rather to the grace of God. Second, the three divine persons together constitute what it is to be God; God *just is* the tri-unity of Father, Son and Spirit. By contrast, our thoughts and actions do not together constitute the divine: God existed before there was any world and would still continue to exist if the universe collapsed into a single infinity dense point (the "Big Crunch") and was no more. (I return to one important caveat in a moment.) Our existence within the divine is, again, a gift of grace from God. Finally, every action of Father, Son and Spirit reflects the moral perfection of God: giving, accepting, glorifying. In fact, the singular beauty of the Christian doctrine of God lies in the incredible richness of the innertrinitarian life. Here the contrast is obvious: no reader of these lines takes his or her thoughts and actions as being models of moral perfection. Only divine grace could make possible the audacious assertion that God allows agents such as ourselves to exist within the being of the divine. On many classical models of the God-world relation, God could be present to humans despite the morally abhorrent things that humans do. But none have located sinful humans within the divine; in fact, in many theologies God must withdraw his presence as a sign of his displeasure or judgment. For panentheists, however, God's grace is so unlimited that God is able to embrace even the darkest of human actions within the very being of God, revealing them to be what they are yet without affirming them.

If there were space, we could explore the christology of panentheism in equal detail. To say just a word: on this view Jesus becomes the exemplar for humanity in a no less profound sense than in classical theism. He actualized the possibility that each human enjoys as one who is made in the image of God: he lived a life of perfect devotion to God, acknowledging the true relationship of creature to Creator in every thought and action. We are within God, and in that sense present to God, no less than Jesus was. But he alone perfectly lived a life that reflected his

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Bracken, *The Triune Symbol: Persons, Process and Community* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1985); *The Divine Matrix: Creativity as Link between East and West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995); and his articles "Process Philosophy and Trinitarian Theology," Parts I and II, *Process Studies* 8/4 (1978): 217-30 and 11/2 (1981): 83-96; and "Energy-Events and Fields," *Process Studies* 18/3 (1989): 153-65.

locatedness within the divine. We are within God, but he is fully God, yet without ceasing to be man.

I said above that one caveat had to be added to the claim that our thoughts and actions do not constitute the divine. It is an insight that we owe to process theologians, although I believe that the framework of panentheism first supplies the means for truly incorporating this insight into Christian theism. Nothing we do influences or changes the essential nature of God, and God could have existed with no less perfection without us. At the same time, however, it's true that our actions do affect the responsive nature of God: that "part" of God that emerges out of God's response to the universe and to humanity. This process insight — that a responsive God is greater, is more fully God, than a dispassionate God-above-history — beautifully summarizes a deep underlying motivation of panentheism. God is the all embracing presence; we live and move and have our being within that Presence; God continually responds to our thoughts and actions with all the perfection of God's character; and that interweaving of our action and God's response of grace yields an overall whole that is richer than either would have been on its own. This is the miracle of creation and of history: that God would deign for it to matter to God that we, in all our frailty, would have existed ... and, even more miraculously, for the result of our existing and interacting with God to be truly good. Herein lies the eschatological hope and the eschatological promise of Christianity: that, in the end, God will be able to say, "Behold, it was good, yea it was very good."