
*Created in
God's image*

Following a chapel service I led at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, a friend approached me, hugged me warmly, and said, "Dorothee, my co-creator!" These words blew my mind. No one had ever said this to me before. I had heard the word "co-creation," but I had shunted it aside as an abstraction; it was never concrete enough for me. And "co-creator" was certainly not a word I would have used in a personal sense. Never would I have referred to a friend or an acquaintance as my co-creator. That would have seemed excessive to me, even arrogant. The truth was that I had had only an intellectual grasp of the meaning of this word and not an existential sense of it. Hearing the name of co-creator bestowed on me heightened my awareness of my own creative power. Creative power is something we all have but often ignore or relinquish. My creative power is my power to renew the world for someone or for a community. Through it I attempt to rebuild the house of life out of the ruins in which we now live.

One premise underlying my concept of co-creation is that the first creation is unfinished. Creation continues; it is an ongoing process. We fail to apprehend the meaning of creation if we reduce it to something that happened once upon a time. The image of God as "the clockmaker"—a god who created a monumental, automatic, perpetually self-winding artificial clock and then disappeared into eternity—still persists in the minds of many people today. This is deism; it is not Christian faith. To take creation seriously requires something quite different from a naive belief in an ever-reliable "clockmaker." If we would genuinely embrace creation, we must confront nothingness.

The tradition teaches us that God created everything out of nothingness. No world existed before God commenced creating the universe; there was only chaos and nothingness. But to say that creation continues is, among other things, to understand that chaos and nothingness are still with us and threaten to destroy "the house of being." The presence of nothingness is a basic fact of human, not just divine, life. We experience two forms of nothingness. One is the void within ourselves, which we typically confront for the first time during our adolescent search for an identity. The discovery of an inner emptiness produces in us a mixture of dread and fascination. We recoil from the void within ourselves, but we are also irresistibly drawn to it, just as when we stare into an abyss from a mountaintop we are repelled, then lured, by the power of the nothingness, the vast empty space before us. Only by confronting the nothingness within ourselves can we aspire to a new act of creation. And only if we participate in creation can we overwhelm the death wish that creeps out of the nothingness.

The other form of nothingness we experience, which is interconnected with the first, is the destructiveness and evil that characterize our world in a transpersonal sense. Because there is the threat of nothingness, a killing, destructive power in the world, we must continue creation. To become involved in the work of co-creation means dealing with the nothingness that threatens to swallow us up. The task of co-creation is not tantamount to planting flowers in the garden and feeling good about it. Co-creation means a little more than that. Those involved in the work of co-creation have to face the nothingness that is in us and surrounds us. Each nuclear bomb is a threat to undo creation and a harbinger of nothingness.

Creation and nothingness are not the sole province of God. We, not just God, confront the specter of nothingness in any authentic creative act we undertake. And through our novel and healing acts we continue the unfinished creation. The tradition, however, teaches otherwise. A theological distinction is always drawn in traditional teaching between "creating" and "making." The act of making is attributed to human beings and involves producing objects out of given materials. The act of creating is reserved for God because God created the universe out of nothingness. Our perception of the divine-human relation has been distorted by the equation of the divine with creation and nothingness and the consignment of humanity to the rudimentary realm of making.

Underlying the theological distinction between creating and making is the fear that God, as a result of human development, will become less important, that human creativity detracts from the power of the divine presence. But we are mistaken if we assume that the life of the creator diminishes as "the created" live more fully. The power of life is not a flat sum that must be divided, unequally, between the creator and the created, although mainstream theology often conveys this strange impression. On the contrary, the more a person develops her creativity, delves into the project of liberation, and transcends her own limitations, the more God is God. God does not cling to creational power, making it his possession, but shares it knowing that good power is shared power.

Although the Hebrew Bible uses the verb "to create" only in relation to God, it contains bold descriptions of human action using metaphors for creational power, such as the ones we find in Isa. 58:6-12:

Is not this the fast that I choose:
 to loose the bonds of wickedness,
 to undo the thongs of the yoke,
 to let the oppressed go free,
 and to break every yoke?
 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
 and bring the homeless poor into your house;
 when you see the naked, to cover him,
 and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?
 Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,
 and your healing shall spring up speedily;
 your righteousness shall go before you,
 the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.
 Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
 you shall cry, and he will say, Here I am.

If you take away from the midst of you the yoke,
 the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,
 if you pour yourself out for the hungry
 and satisfy the desire of the afflicted,
 then shall your light rise in the darkness
 and your gloom be as the noonday.
 And the Lord will guide you continually,
 and satisfy your desire with good things,
 and make your bones strong;
 and you shall be like a watered garden,
 like a spring of water,
 whose waters fail not.

And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
 you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
 you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
 the restorer of streets to dwell in.

In these verses Isaiah describes the work of justice in terms of creation: "to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free . . . then shall your light break forth like the dawn. . . . You shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in." Every time I venture into places like parts of Harlem, I recall Isaiah's vision of "the restorer of streets to dwell in." There are about fifteen million jobless people in the United States right now, and yet so much work needs to be done to reconstitute the world from the ruins of our existence. Who will be the "repairer of the breach" and "the restorer of streets to dwell in"? Who will continue creation?

Isaiah 58:6–12 shows that doing justice and "breaking every yoke" is the way we become co-creators. Then our light breaks forth like the dawn. It is the light of those who pour themselves out for the hungry that will rise in the darkness. Isaiah also uses the image of a watered garden, which is evocative of paradise and its four streams. "You shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters fail not," says the prophet. All this natural imagery—light, noonday, water—serves to underscore the concept of a creation that continues to lighten the darkness. We are called to participate in creation, which is not an accomplished fact of our past but constitutes our very future. As co-creators, we participate in the goodness of creation when we undo evil.

If creation continues by virtue of our participation in it, what does this mean for our understanding of God? Carter Heyward arrives at this conclusion:

God is "no one" but is rather a transpersonal spirit, power in relation, which depends upon humanity for making good/making justice/making love/making God incarnate in the world. To do so is to undo evil. The doing of good and undoing of evil is a human act, a human responsibility. God is our power to do this.¹

Power-in-relation works through us. Arguing that "any creative relation is *mutually-messianic*,"² Heyward shifts our expectations for a divine messiah who would be our God but not our friend, to a God-

human relation characterized by the mutuality of friendship and empowerment.

Although the concept of God as power-in-relation sounds heretical from a traditional perspective, it has solid scriptural grounding. The biblical expression that approximates Heyward's understanding of creative relationality is holiness. The word "holy" applies to both God and humanity. In the context of the giving of the commandments, God says to Moses: "You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2). This theme recurs in Matthew 5: "You are the light of the world (v. 14) and "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (v. 48). The traditional concept of holiness pertains to our co-creative role with God in alleviating human suffering and making justice in the world. But is there any need for people in Western culture "to be more holy," as a black American spiritual puts it? Is there anyone who wants to sing, "Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart?"

In 1983, I had a perplexing experience in the classroom of a liberal arts college. The class was exploring the meaning of human suffering, death, and dying. They had read my book on suffering. When I arrived I felt a certain tension in the room. "What are the boundaries of suffering?" was the first question I heard, from a shrill voice that belonged to an attractive, healthy-looking young woman of eighteen. Had she ever experienced genuine suffering in her life, I wondered. "How far should we go in response to suffering?" she queried. I chose not to respond directly to her questions in order to flush out the reaction of the class as a whole to my perspective on suffering. Some of the students felt that I demanded they take on all the sufferings of the world. The young woman who questioned me initially felt overwhelmed by my implicit request that she immerse herself in the sufferings of other people, particularly the sufferings of the Third World, sufferings that we in the First World, as I pointed out to her, largely create. Once more, now angrily, she pressed me: "Doesn't this have to stop somewhere? Where are the boundaries?"

At that moment, the New Testament story came to mind where Peter asks Jesus, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus replies, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:21–22). I had no sooner finished telling this story when I was bombarded with indignant

responses from several students. "I am not Jesus." "Forget about Jesus." "What do you expect us to be? Do you expect us to be saints?" The debate was superficial, because we never explored the real causes of suffering. What this debate conveyed to me were the well-developed defense mechanisms of these young people in relation to the suffering of others, their rejection of any responsibility whatsoever for suffering, and the absence of any feeling of solidarity with other people and other cultures. My wish, to be holy because God is holy, stood alongside the vehement refusal of these students to confront suffering, especially the suffering of others. When someone called out, "I am not Jesus," I, feeling intimidated, nevertheless shot back, "Why not?" Why not try to live differently? Why not try to be co-creators and co-sufferers at one and the same time? This class displayed a glaring, practical lack of anything we might call faith, trust, holiness, transcendence.

A quintessential moment in the history of religion is the time God says in Lev. 19:2, "You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy." The directive is clear: We, not only God, are destined to be holy. We are beckoned to approximate God. We are invited to acquire and practice the quality of holiness that characterizes God by doing the work of love and justice. Knowing Yahweh means doing justice. Based on this understanding, the Jewish tradition emphasizes the imitation of God. The Talmud explicitly states that we are able to imitate God's actions: "It is possible to imagine that man can be as holy as God."²³ The Jewish tradition, however, also ascribes to God a holiness which surpasses that of the human being: "My holiness is higher than any degree of holiness you can reach." But the rabbinical insistence on the supreme holiness of God still does not negate the emphasis on our human capacity for holiness. Created in the image of God, we therefore are able to imitate God. "What means the text, 'Ye shall walk after the Lord your God?'" In answer to this rhetorical question, the Talmud replies that the meaning of the text is "to follow the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He: as He clothed the naked, so do you clothe the naked, as He visited the sick, so do you visit the sick. . . ."²⁴ Again and again the Talmud quotes different parts of the Hebrew Bible to underscore the idea that it is possible to imitate God. Remembering our Jewish religious roots is one way of restoring our trust in human beings, who are created, as the psalmist says, "a little less than God" (Ps. 8:5).

In the Bible there are many positive images and affirmations about

the human being which speak to us about the holiness of life, the wholeness of human life, and about God-with-us and our being one with God. We are not mere vessels into which something like grace is poured; on the contrary, we are living parts of active love. A stirring commentary on the Lord's Prayer by a Nicaraguan peasant woman is recorded in Ernesto Cardenal's *The Gospel in Solentiname*. To the petition "Holy be your name" she responded:

To make something holy then doesn't mean to chant, to say prayers, to have processions, to read the Bible. Making the name of God holy means to love others, to do something for others. If we set to glorifying God just with prayers and processions as we used to, we're not making God holy at all. In other words, to make love real is to make the name of God holy or to make his person known here on earth, even though maybe the name of God won't even be mentioned.⁵

The woman's understanding of God's holiness stresses not separation but unification between God and the human being. To make something holy is to make justice real. Cardenal suggests that "Holy be your name" might be better translated as "May your person be made known" or "May you be acknowledged (doing justice)."²⁶

Many Protestant denominations deny human beings the power to imitate God in doing justice. Instead of celebrating our participation in creation, Protestantism emphasizes the unchangeability of the world and human sinfulness. Many Protestant theologies have concluded that we cannot change because we are so evil and because we have no power. This deprecatory talk cuts us down and severs us from faith and participation in God's good creation. The deeply ingrained anthropological pessimism of most Protestant denominations has no basis in the Jewish affirmation of our being created as images of God, empowered to grow into love and to become love ourselves. One of the tasks for theology in our time is to overcome this anthropological pessimism which denies our co-creatorship with God.

In the history of Christianity there are two opposite theological concepts of the God-human relation that may be differentiated under the rubrics of "otherness" and "sameness." Under the former rubric, God is the "wholly other"; under the latter, God and humanity may achieve a mystical union. If God is the wholly other or the stranger, as Hegel called God in his early writings, then God, as Hegel put it, is a stranger who rules over estranged people.⁷ God's otherness makes God into a

stranger and estranges humanity on earth. People do not feel at home; instead they wander like Abraham. It is clear that under the "otherness" rubric the distance between God and humankind is indefinite and unbridgeable. John Calvin and Karl Barth, for example, both display an overweening fear of sameness, of the possibility that someone might come too close to God or, worse yet, achieve a mystical union with God. Orthodox Protestantism deeply fears the possibility of sameness, of the identification of God with humanity, and therefore it fears mysticism. Mysticism is seen as an idolatrous deification of the human being. In orthodox Protestantism, God is understood primarily as a person, more specifically as a father, who above all demands obedience. This is the ethical implication of God's wholly otherness. If God is the other, then the basic thing he wants from us is obedience. Our salvation is then dependent on our obedience to the will of God. Under this rubric, salvation is construed as forensic justification. God or Christ declares the sinner justified, that is, saved. Salvation hinges on a freely willed act of God, who in the name of a judge passes final sentence on the crest-fallen sinner. Sin here amounts to idolatry and disobedience.

Under the "sameness" rubric, the emphasis is on the God with us, the God within us, and the God with whom we can identify and finally be united. The images invoked by this tradition are often taken from nature—God as the depth, the abyss, the source of life, the water, the ocean. In mystical terms, salvation is equivalent to union with God, and therefore, in contrast with the "otherness" rubric, sin is alienation and

<i>Otherness</i>	<i>Sameness</i>
Infinite distance	Mystical union
God as the wholly other, stranger	God within us, the birth of God in the soul
Father image	Depth, abyss, ocean, source
Obedience to God	Empowerment by God
Salvation: forensic justification	Salvation: sanctification and union with God
Sin: idolatry, disobedience	Sin: alienation, emptiness
Orthodox Protestantism	Mysticism

emptiness. Sin is much more a matter of despair than of disobedience and idolatry. Sanctification, not mere justification, is the result of salvation. That we are created in the image of God connotes neither the total mystical union between God and humanity nor the total otherness of God. However, any good theology contains a mystical element. It is almost impossible for any theology totally to deny God's empowerment of us.

When we understand God as power-in-relation and ourselves as being empowered, then we are inspired to testify to the goodness of creation. There is a growing need among Christian feminists and others involved in liberation struggles to develop new ways of celebrating our own createdness and that of the world. Old terminology, in the mode of "Praise the Lord, the Almighty," will no longer suffice. We are in search of a different language, because the traditional language of praise does not work for us, and the contemporary inability to praise creation, the silence that comes out of despair, is not acceptable either. Both old religious and secular language do not satisfy the need I sense in many groups to develop a spirituality of creation. We are still in search of a new God-language and a way to express our ultimate concerns. Power-in-relation is a name Carter Heyward has given to God. I would like to encourage the reader to find her own names for God, to share them with others, and so participate in the human religious venture of naming who God is for us.

One of my favorite Bible stories is the healing of the epileptic boy in Mark 9. It is a story of the helplessness and powerlessness experienced by Jesus' disciples, who when approached by the father of the sick boy are unable to cast the demon out. They stand paralyzed before the suffering of the possessed son and his grieving father and consequently are subjected to the scorn and ridicule of a group of scribes and Pharisees in public. When Jesus comes on the scene, instead of consoling his friends, he makes clear to them that their inability to heal the boy signifies their lack of faith. He pronounces them a "faithless generation." If they believed in the power of life, they would participate in that power and thus be able to do what they think only Jesus can do: perform a miracle. And when the boy's father fervently beseeches Jesus to heal his son but qualifies his appeal with "if you can do anything," Jesus rebukes him as well: "If you can! All things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23). In other words, when will you finally abandon this if-you-can

talk? When will you finally give up your impotence, your weakness, your unbelief in the healing power of God? When will you begin to do God's work, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and casting out demons? When will you discover that all is possible to her who participates in God's power? I learned from this story that one of God's names is "All-is-possible," and I know that if I cannot talk to All-is-possible, if I do not listen to All-is-possible, if I do not believe in All-is-possible, then I am dead. Thus my prayer would be to ask All-is-possible to be present.

In my own search for a new language of celebration, I am struck by the fact that verbs, not nouns, spring to mind. I need to wonder, to be amazed, to be in awe, to renew myself in the rhythm of creation, to perceive its beauty, to rejoice in creation, and to praise the source of life. Listing these verbs reminds me of people who believe that God has created them and all creatures, who trust in the goodness of creation. I cannot forget, however, all my brothers and sisters who have never learned to wonder, to be amazed, to renew themselves, and to rejoice. I think of those whose experiences do not lead to a deep trust and a belief in the goodness of creation. In German there is a colloquial expression for the people I have in mind—he or she is a *kaputter Typ*. He or she is broken, tuned out, kaput, without meaning or function. The German word *kaputt* refers to a machine or a thing, not to an organic whole. In the world of the *kaputter Typ*, there is no sense of relatedness to other people. Relationships are disturbed or even nonexistent. The language of the broken one cannot reach another person. She is unable to express her feelings, and her perception of the world is absurdly reduced. Her action does not make use of her capacities. The broken person has no trust in creation, no sense of her createdness or the possibility of empowerment. The broken person has been socialized in a culture that threatens all the capacities of human beings to take in creation in wonder and in awe, in self-renewal and in appreciation of beauty, in joy and in expressions of gratefulness and praise. Who then is the *kaputter Typ*? I will not answer this question, because we know him too well. You know him as I know her. After a long talk with a depressed student, I, exhausted from listening to him, finally asked, "Was there anything in the last year about which you felt some joy?" His response was that even the word "joy" had not come to his lips for two years, and he

added that, objectively speaking, he had no use for such a word. He had never learned how to wonder or to be amazed.

Philosophy began with wondering, *thaumazein*. Wondering is part of our day-to-day experience as well. I recall when my youngest daughter learned to tell time. One day, in utter joy, she exclaimed, "Look, Mom, this is a truly wonderful five before half-past-six!" Perhaps children are the greatest conveyors of amazement. They do not bypass anything as too trivial or mundane. They free us from our banal and dull perspectives. To affirm creation means to enter into the freedom of amazement and delight. Nothing is simply available, usable, or to be taken for granted. The broken person will counter, "What is so special about it? It has always been that way." His capacity to trivialize everything has surpassed his capacity to wonder. He is crippled by a "dryness of the heart," as the mystics termed it. He no longer wonders about the wonders of the world. Children and artists are teachers of a spirituality of creation. They recombine created things into a new synthesis, and they change triviality into wonder, givenness into createdness. Through them we unlearn triviality and learn amazement; we again see the magnolia tree, and we see it as if for the first time.

Another element essential to a spirituality of creation is the human capacity to perceive beauty. We are able to notice, to observe, to perceive in a purposeless way that we call aesthetics. In German, the verb "to perceive" is *wahrnehmen*. Its literal meaning, which is "to take something as true," demonstrates that perception is related to truth. Our aesthetic perception lures us into truth. When "the doors to perception are cleansed," as Blake put it, we see more and we perceive the created world in a different way. The world appears no longer as disposable dead stuff but as a vital growing organism. In aesthetics we are all animists who believe that there is a soul in every living being. Our perception of aesthetic objects makes them responsive. A dialogue ensues between the perceiver and the otherwise inanimate object. We grasp the interrelatedness of creation in this dialogue between the sun and me, the birch and me. Perhaps then we see as God saw in the beginning when she said, "It is very good." The Hebrew word for good, *tov*, also means fair or beautiful. Thus God said on creating the universe, "Behold, it is all very beautiful." To love creation means to perceive its beauty in the most unexpected places. An aesthetic education that deep-

ens our perception is not a luxury for the elite but a cultural necessity for everyone. To believe in creation is to perceive and to engage in the aesthetic mode of perception. One cannot love God if one does not know what beauty is:

Ernesto Cardenal,
questioned on how he came to be
a poet, a priest,
and a revolutionary,
gave as his first reason
love of beauty.

This led him, he said,
to poetry
(and beyond);
it led him
to god
(and beyond);
it led him
to the gospel
(and beyond);
it led him
to socialism
(and beyond).

How weak a love of beauty must be
that is content with house beautiful;
how trivial a love of poetry
that stops with the text;
how small a love of god
that becomes sated in him
not hungrier;
how little we love the gospel
if we keep it to ourselves;
how powerless are socialistic yearnings
if they fear
to go beyond what will be.⁸

The most terrifying quality about the life of the broken person—both the one I meet and the one I am—is the absence of joy. In the Jewish tradition, joy was understood as the most natural response to our having been created, while sadness was deemed a rejection of the gift of life. In this metaphysical sense, joy is not derived from special

events or the presents we receive; it involves the mere delight in being alive and gratefulness for the gift of life. But for an increasing number of people in secular culture the expression “a gift of life” does not make too much sense: If the giver disappears, why should we see life as a gift at all, why should we not understand it instead as a biological accident, a casual event, an unforeseen occurrence that neither has nor requires an explanation? When life has lost its quality of being something given to us, it turns into a mere matter of fact. People grow up in this culture without any education for joy. Does the deep, reasonless joy of being alive die in a world without religion? Does it make a difference with regard to our capacity for enjoyment whether we live in a world we think is made by human beings or in one we believe to be created by God? I do not know the answer to these questions, yet I observe a remarkable absence of joy in secular, industrialized cultures. At the same time, my own spiritual experience teaches me that to recall creation, to be reminded of our createdness in a community of people who struggle together, enhances my own awareness of joy—of how much I need it, how much I yearn for it. A spirituality of creation reminds us that we were born for joy.

These elements of a creation-centered spirituality—wonder, renewal, a sense of beauty, and the capacity to rejoice—are integrated into the act of praising creation. To love someone is, among other things, to praise the person we love. To laud is another purposeless action of which only the human being is capable, at least consciously. The early church fathers said that even animals laud God, but without awareness. If we are in love with someone, we are seized by the need to make our love explicit, to speak about the beloved one. We rush to discover a language in which we can praise the beloved. Could it be that we are in love with creation, as God is according to James Weldon Johnson's poem? If this is true, then it is not enough to think about nature's beauty; we have to articulate it. Our feelings become stronger and clearer when we express them. We become better lovers of the earth when we tell the earth how beautiful it is. It takes time to learn how to praise the beauty of creation. On the way, we rekindle our gratitude and shed the self who took creation for granted. We recover the sense of awe before life; we recover the lost reverence and passion for the living. This is not a saccharine, superficial form of spirituality.

I am reminded of an incident that occurred while I was teaching a class on mysticism which illustrates for me what a creational spirituality is and is not. A group of students had prepared a session on Francis of Assisi. They read aloud from his "Canticle of Brother Sun":

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather
through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.
Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.
Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love
and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.
Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no living man can escape.⁹

The students then proceeded to show several slides of sunsets and the sea, accompanied by a pious commentary on "The Canticle" in traditional theological language. Other members of the class grew impatient with their incessant, euphonious praise. Finally I interrupted the leaders and asked: "If you really love Sister Water, can you then talk in a timeless language as if nothing had happened to her? If you really love Brother Wind today, can you then forget pollution? Can you be silent about acid rain in North America? If you love someone who is going to be killed right before your eyes, would you be able to continue talking about the beauty of creation? If you learned anything from St. Francis, can you imagine how he would speak today? Did you not notice that the sentimental strain of Franciscan spirituality kills the spirit of Francis and is a sellout to the official church? If you really love Sister Water, can you forget that our rivers are dying?" Praising creation is not just a matter of elevating its beatific aspects. Francis of Assisi also included Sister Bodily Death in his praises.

In her novel *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker presents a conversation between two black women about God which is one of the best texts on religion in contemporary literature that I know of. The exchange between Celie and Shug has a dual thrust. On the one hand, it is a critique of traditional religion, its God-talk and its God-image; on the other hand, it is an attempt to affirm God in a new manner.

Celie has lived her life with a God-image that she now recognizes is dubious in the extreme. When Shug asks what Celie's God looks like, she sheepishly replies, "He big and old and tall and graybearded and white. He wear white robes and go barefooted." His eyes are "sort of bluish-gray. Cool. Big though. White lashes. . . ." ¹⁰ This God represents the power that white people have over blacks and that men have over women. With the awareness that the God she has been praying to all her life is a white man comes the shocking realization that she detests, and no longer needs, this God who "sit up there glorying in being deaf. . . ." ¹¹ Just as "white people never listen to colored, period," ¹² so this God has never listened to the cries of the black woman Celie, whose father was lynched, whose mother was deranged, whose stepfather raped her repeatedly, whose life, prior to meeting Shug, was stunted by unrelenting toil and humiliation. And yet Celie struggles with God. Her need for God persists past her burgeoning rejection of an outworn white male deity: "But deep in my heart I care about God. What he going to think. And come to find out, he don't think. . . . But it ain't easy, trying to do without God." ¹³

Shug has already laid to rest her once negative and empty concept of God: "When I found out I thought God was white, and a man, I lost interest." ¹⁴ This realization, however, signaled the beginning of her religious journey, not the end. Inspired to move beyond "the old white man," Shug now challenges Celie with a full-blown conception of God that departs radically from white, patriarchal definitions:

Here's the thing . . . the thing I believe. God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. And sometimes it just manifest itself even if you not looking, or don't know what you looking for. Trouble do it for most folks, I think. Sorrow, lord. Feeling like shit. ¹⁵

Hers is a creational spirituality. The dialogue between this God and Shug, who refers to God as "It" because "God ain't a he or a she,"¹⁶ flows out of her awareness that everything in creation is of God. "Listen," she says to Celie, "God love everything you love—and a mess of stuff you don't."¹⁷ Shug's God-talk is grounded in her experience as a woman and in her love of life.

Shug's exceptional reflections on the relationship between God and humans climax in a passionate affirmation of the source of all life: "But more than anything else, God love admiration. . . . I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it."¹⁸ God is not synonymous with omnipotent control; rather, God's power lies in sharing life with others. The admiration God loves is our sense of connectedness with the whole of creation. We all have difficulties with praising the God of creation. We all often walk by the color purple in a field and don't notice it. But God does not give up trying to lure us into oneness with all creation.

NOTES

1. Isabel Carter Heyward, *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982), p. 159.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
3. A. Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), p. 23.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 211.
5. Ernesto Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname*, trans. Donald D. Walsh (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1976), p. 209.
6. *Ibid.*
7. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox and R. Kroner (New York: Harper & Row, 1948).
8. Dorothee Sölle, "Ernesto Cardenal," in *Revolutionary Patience*, trans. Rita and Robert Kimber (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1974), pp. 64–65.
9. Francis of Assisi, "The Canticle of Brother Sun," in *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, trans. Regis J. Armstrong and Ignatius C. Brady (New York and Toronto: Paulist Press, 1982), p. 39.
10. Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), p. 165.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*