

tures be imperfect? 2) The concept of ID harkens back to the 'God of the Gaps' of the 17th century in which God's creation was imperfect and He had to change the course of events from time to time to get it back on track. This concept has not been accepted by mainstream theologians for a long, long time. 3) Consistent with what has just

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In an address to the Pontifical Academy of Science in

October 2014 Pope Francis said, "When we read about Creation in Genesis, we run the risk of imagining God as a magician, with a magic wand able to do everything. But that is not so. He created human beings and let them develop according to the internal laws that He gave to each

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one so they would reach their fulfillment...God is not a divine being or a magician, but the Creator who brought everything to life. Evolution in nature is not inconsistent with the notion of creation, because evolution requires the creation of beings that evolve."

Panentheism and Belief in the Incarnation

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One of most widely used terms in contemporary Christian systematic theology is undoubtedly *panentheism* (everything in God but distinct from God in terms of its own existence and mode of operation). The term nicely provides a middle ground position between two extremes in the conventional understanding of the God-world relationship: pantheism (God and the world as a single conjoint reality) and dualism (God and the world as totally different realities with God as the higher-order spiritual reality empowering the existence and activity of material creation from moment to moment). Panentheism, however, seems to correspond to what Paul said to the Athenians in the Acts of the Apostles: God is that reality in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17/28). But beyond simply repeating what is said in Sacred Scripture, the notion of panentheism is notoriously difficult to explain philosophically.

For in classical Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics, every finite entity that exists in its own right has a single substantial form or governing structure (cf. e.g., Aquinas, ST, I, Q. 76, art. 3) Everything else is either a contingent qualification or "accident" of some finite entity or is an entity that has lost its own identity through incorporation into some more complex entity. An example would

be food taken into the human body that is absorbed into the physical constitution of the human being. The meat, potatoes and vegetables are now part of me as a higher organism. But according to the doctrine of panentheism, finite creatures still exist as themselves even as they live, move and have their being within the all-encompassing

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Yet in virtue of their belief in the doctrine of the Incarnation, Christians are also saying that in the person of Jesus the divine life and the created order of things harmoniously co-exist as a single physical reality. In the decree against monophysitism (one soul) at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, for example, we read: "We confess one and the same Christ, the Son, the Lord, the Only-Begotten,

Continues on page 6

in two natures unconfused, unchangeable, undivided and inseparable. The difference of natures will never be abolished by their being united, but rather the properties of each remain unimpaired, both coming together in one person and substance, not parted or divided among two persons” (DS 302). The Fathers of the Church did not attempt to explain this paradoxical statement but instead affirmed it as a basic article of the Christian faith. Aquinas in his *Summa theologiae* likewise did not try to explain this doctrine but simply claimed that, while other human beings can be united with God through knowledge and love, Jesus in his human nature is more intimately united with God by reason of his very existence as a divine person (ST, III, Q. 2, art. 10). Within the limits of his own basically Aristotelian metaphysics, Aquinas could offer no further explanation. But could another metaphysical system be substituted, not so much to “explain” in the strict sense, but at least to make more intelligible the mystery of the God-world relationship and the doctrine of the Incarnation?

But where would one look for such a new world view or approach to reality? As the name “metaphysics” (what comes after physics) itself implies, Aristotle evidently derived his metaphysical principles from reflection on the way that the world of nature seemed to work. He concluded that we human beings are individual finite entities who live in a world populated by finite entities, both animate and inanimate. We find ourselves constantly involved with one another in and through various forms of relationship: some that are necessary for our individual survival and prosperity; others that just happen to be the case as a result of external circumstances. This allowed Aristotle to conclude that the world is composed of individual things (substances) and their multiple properties (accidents). Moreover, this world of interrelated finite entities seems to be governed by four organizational principles: material, formal, efficient and final causation. Only if these principles work in harmony with one another can the good order of the natural world be preserved.

At the beginning of the 16th century, however, philosophers and theologians came to distrust this logically consistent but still quite abstract understanding of physical reality. More and more they turned to direct observation and analysis of the workings of physical reality. Whereas Aquinas and other medieval scholastics gave special attention to final causation, the relatively fixed order of the

world as set up and continually sustained in existence by God, early modern philosophers and theologians focused for the most part on efficient causality, the way individual things de facto impact on one another and are themselves subject to external forces like gravity. This heavily analytic approach to reality led early modern scientists like Galileo and Newton to imagine the world as a cosmic machine governed by deterministic laws set in place by God as Creator of heaven and earth. But in the life-sciences this mechanistic approach to reality did not work well. Something akin to Aristotelian final causality was still needed to explain how living things could seemingly have an internal principle of self-organization with an inbuilt directionality toward further order and complexity. Moreover, given the necessary interdependence of individual organisms on other organisms and on an ever-changing physical environment in which they co-existed, focus was now given to systems or ongoing networks of organisms within the physical environment. The classical laws of cause and effect that were originally thought to be operative between individual entities, accordingly, had to be modified so as to allow for simultaneous reciprocal causation of physical systems on one another. For example, atoms in combination co-produce the higher-order reality of a molecule. But the molecule, once it comes into existence, constrains or limits the further activity of its constituent atoms. They are no longer free to function on their own simply as individual mini-entities.

The new world view or metaphysics that arises out of this systems-oriented approach to physical reality is, accordingly, itself systems-based. The world is seen as a vast network of dynamically interrelated systems, all of which are ordered one way or another to a universal energy-source or life-system. But does this imply philosophical determinism with every individual entity tightly governed by the laws of the system(s) in which it is located? Some natural scientists in their search for a Theory of Everything would argue yes; in the end everything that happens is strictly governed by the predetermined laws of the system. But other natural scientists, especially those in the life-sciences, would say no. There is far too much contingency and unpredictability in the day-to-day workings of the natural world. Furthermore, as chaos theory makes clear, initial small changes in the operation of one natural system can produce a ripple effect on all the other systems

Continues on page 7

with which it is connected and they in turn can have a ripple effect upon still other systems to which they are linked. Thus Nature is basically composed of open-ended systems that keep reconstructing themselves in response to the workings of other systems around them and their shared physical environment. Yet open-ended systems

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by definition are not deterministic. Nature is alive, full of spontaneity, not a totally predictable cosmic machine as once believed.

So would this new systems-oriented approach to physical reality be of value in rethinking the puzzling features of the classical doctrine of the Incarnation and provide some new insight into what might be meant by panentheism as a model for the God-world relationship? Without entering in specific details, I would say yes. For example, if one rereads the classical formulation of the doctrine of the Incarnation cited earlier, and substitutes "life-system" for "nature," then the following doctrinal statement emerges: We confess one and the same Christ, the Son, the Lord, the Only-Begotten, in two life-systems unconfused, unchangeable, undivided and inseparable. The difference of life-systems will never be abolished by their being united, but rather the properties of each remain unimpaired, both coming together in one person and substance, not parted or divided among two persons"

Hence, during his earthly life, Jesus as God Incarnate actively participated in the divine life-system proper to the three divine persons. Accordingly, as Scripture testifies, he felt a special relationship to God as his Father and to the Spirit as constant companion and source of spiritual energy. Yet in terms of his equally important participation in the life-system proper to human beings, Jesus experienced all the normal ups and downs of life in a mortal body: joys and sorrows, feelings of success and failure, etc. Those who knew him and listened to his message realized that he was no ordinary human being. He was at least a prophet, perhaps the long-expected Messiah. Yet Jesus could not conclusively prove to his followers that he was God Incarnate. As a result, from a purely human perspective, his ministry of preaching and assuring others

of God's love for them ended in rejection and apparent failure.

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With his resurrection from the dead, of course, the way that Jesus participated in both the divine and human life-systems changed dramatically. Released from the constraints of time and space, the risen Jesus unexpectedly appeared and then just as abruptly disappeared before the astonished eyes of his followers on Easter Sunday. Likewise, to this day he is present in terms of his glorified body and blood wherever and whenever the Eucharist is celebrated. It is now the divine life in Jesus that takes priority even though he still remains the human being who was born, grew up, lived and died in ancient Israel.

How does this new systems-oriented approach to the doctrine of the Incarnation influence our efforts to understand the term panentheism? Panentheism implies that in the beginning there was one system, the life-system proper to the divine persons in their eternal co-existence as one God. Almost 14 billion years ago, the life-systems proper to the world of creation originated in elementary form from within the depths of the divine life-system. God thus became incarnate in this world from the moment of the Big Bang onwards, identifying initially with the myriad subatomic particles that with their explosive energy set the ever-expanding parameters of space and time in our universe. This identification of God with material creation was, of course, rudimentary in the beginning, but it grew in stature and importance as slowly but surely the material universe took shape in terms of order and complexity. The triune God thereby allowed the universe to develop according to [its] own laws through a very long process of trial and error with only subtle divine "nudges" or "inspirations" to the creatures of this world at appropriate moments. But eventually the moment came for God to become incarnate in this world in a strikingly new way, that is, in the birth, life, tragic death and bodily resurrection of a human being living 2,000 years ago in ancient Israel. But this ever closer identification of God with material creation has still not ended. No one knows how much

Continues on page 8

longer it will take before the cosmic love-affair between God and creation comes to an end and material creation is fully integrated into the divine life. Then every creature of this world, each in its own way, will experience itself as a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5/17) within the life of the triune God. What originally came forth from God will return to God but with the distinct finite identity that it achieved through participation, however short or long in duration, within the life-systems proper to this world.

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(Editor’s note: Father Bracken’s most recently book published by Fortress Press is titled *The World in the Trinity: Open-Ended Systems in Science and Religion.*)

Also for extended reading on this topic, see Denis Edward’s book, *Partaking of God: Trinity, Evolution and Ecology* published by Liturgical Press, (2014) recommended by Carla Mae Streeter, OP, Aquinas institute of Theology, St Louis Missouri.

Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy 1986 United States Catholic Bishops

The Editors chose to reprint a section of this important pastoral letter of the United States Bishops published almost 30 years ago. The six principal themes governing this letter for the decade of the 80s strongly relate to the problems we see today in society three decades later. The entire letter may be accessed at the USCCB web site but space constraints limit us to printing some introductory material and the six principle themes.

*This document provides valuable preparatory material for your consideration prior to our own ITEST conference/seminar on Economic Justice in the 21st Century: Myth or Reality? scheduled for October 23-25th at the Rigali Center in S. Louis. In the six principles we see a foreshadowing of some of Pope Francis’ own reflections on the economy as stated in his apostolic exhortation, **Evangelii Gaudium, the Joy of the Gospel**. The Bishops wrote, “This letter is a personal invitation to Catholics to use the resources of our faith, the strength of our economy, and the opportunities of our democracy to shape a society that better protects the dignity and basic rights of our sisters and brothers, both in this land and around the world.” (#2EJ)*

#13. *Every economic decision and institution must be judged in light of whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person.* The pastoral letter begins with the human person. We believe the person is sacred—the clearest reflection of God among us. Human dignity comes from God, not from nationality, race, sex, econom-

Human dignity comes from God, not from nationality, race, sex, economic status, or any human accomplishment.

ic status, or any human accomplishment. We judge any economic system by what it does for and to people and by how it permits all to participate in it The economy should serve people, not the other way around.

#14. *Human dignity can be realized and protected only in community.* In our teaching, the human person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society—in economics and politics, in law and policy—directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. The obligation to “love our neighbor” has an individual dimension, but it also requires a broader social

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commitment to the common good. We have many partial ways to measure and debate the health of our economy: Gross National Product, per capita income, stock market prices, and so forth. The Christian vision of economic life looks beyond them all and asks. Does economic life en-

Continues on page 9