

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE MODELS OF GOD IN SALLIE MCFAGUE'S METAPHORICAL THEOLOGY

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Abstract

Sallie McFague, a prominent theologian from the United States, has significantly contributed to the field of metaphorical theology. Her primary critique pertains to the inadequacy and lack of justification for the dominant language and metaphors employed in traditional theological discourse concerning God's relationship with the natural world. McFague's publication titled "Models of God: Theology for the Ecological, Nuclear Age" critiques the patriarchal model of the relationship between God and the world. By highlighting the limitations of this model, McFague proposes alternative models of mother, lover, and friend to describe our relationship with God that is more relevant to contemporary concerns. McFague suggests a model of creation as God's body to underscore the comprehension of our relationship to creation. The analogy between the world and the body of God implies that God is both transcendent in creation and fundamentally effective in terms of creation. Because as God's body, God is both transcendent and radically immanent in creation, our present home, where we must be actors in it as well and not tourists or temporary residents, McFague's primary approach involves utilizing the Bible, tradition, feminist concepts, cognitive processes, and personal experiences as a foundation for constructing her intended theology. The present article adopts an analytical approach to expound upon the models of God that are derived from Sallie McFague's metaphorical theology. The present article aims to elucidate McFague's theological methodology as it is reflected in her works.

Keywords: *McFague, Models of God, Metaphorical theology, Mother, Lover, Friend*

1. INTRODUCTION

Sallie McFague's birthplace was Quincy, Massachusetts, on May 25, 1933, and her demise occurred on November 15, 2019. Throughout her theological career, she advanced the field of metaphorical theology as a means of addressing the unsatisfactory outcomes associated with the prevailing language utilized within Christian churches, which continues to persist to a certain degree. Her essential thesis is that how we speak is how we think, and how we think is how we act. And further, how we speak of ourselves, our world and our God can only be in metaphors; there is no single unique way. And finally, the theology that we practice must be rooted in the present context. McFague's fundamental critique is that the current language and metaphors employed to depict God, or more specifically, to articulate God's relationship with the world, have lost their significance and relevance in contemporary times. She does not reject this language or metaphor, acknowledging their potential suitability in their time. However, she does not hesitate to criticize them, pointing out their weaknesses and, in some cases, their perverse consequences in our time. She asserts that certain terms used to refer to God have been absolutized, making them almost idolatrous. The metaphors and models proposed by McFague are intertwined with her critiques, both explicit and implicit, of the prevailing theology in Christianity. (Q. Hugh J. Gwyn, 2011, pp. 10-18)

McFague, in her capacity as a theologian, conducted a study of Carl Barth's commentary on Romans, which led to her formulation of a precise comprehension of the concept of radical monotheism. This notion, as expounded by her mentor, H. Richard Niebuhr posits that God is the sole deity. There is only Him, without any other entities or beings. The concept of God is posited as being ontologically superior to human existence and philosophical comprehension. Paul Tillich posits that this Protestant

principle served as the foundation of her theology. However, in the course of this development, she relinquished her initial comprehension of the marvels of life and their reliance on God. (Annalet van Schaalkwyk, 2008, p.206) McFague invites Christians to think of God more as a mother, lover, friend, and soul than as a timeless and all-pervasive supreme presence. He contends that these are metaphors that, when employed, replace the idea of God as a personal being with the idea of God as an omnipresent, all-pervasive entity. They are replaced with love, which has an impact on evolutionary processes. Each metaphor represents God as a different species, a different form of you, who is fundamentally tied to everything as a maternal, amorous, and pleasant presence. (McFague, 1987, pp. 73, 83-84) Each one is a different way to imagine God—who is undoubtedly a power of love—as a human being. Imagining God as a mother, lover, or friend in this instance, and then as a less intimate presence in the shape of God as a soul, serves as a metaphorical actor.

1.1. Method of Study

The present study is grounded in the theological ideas of Sallie McFague, with a particular focus on her published works, including "Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language" and "Models of God: Theology for the Ecological, Nuclear Age". These works have been subject to thorough examination and analysis.

1.2. Background of the Study

Through an analysis of the background and a keyword search utilizing terms such as "models of God," "metaphorical theology," and "Sally McFague," it has been ascertained that no research has been conducted in the Persian language on the subject matter of this article or aligned with the theological principles and perspectives of Sally McFague. However, regarding Persian studies, Vahida Fakhar Noghani (2019, pp. 101-122), in her article titled "Examining and Criticizing the Model of Creation as God's Body in Environmental Theology," examined McFague's eco-feminist theological views by proposing the model of creation as God's body on the role of religious teachings in solving the environmental crisis. Moreover, Saeedeh Mirsadri (2018, pp. 106-96) in her article titled "A Note on the Book of God's Models" introduced and analyzed some chapters from Sally McFague's book, "Models of God: Theology for the Ecological, Nuclear Age".

2. DISCUSSION

2.1. The Concept of Metaphor Based on Sallie McFague's Perspectives

The absence of metaphor results in a lack of significance. According to McFague, the absence of metaphor would result in the absence of truth, reality, and emotion. (McFague, 1987, P. 37-192) Wherever you find meaning, she teaches, you should explore the metaphors and understand how they work. In 1975, McFague made a significant contribution to the field of metaphor with the publication of "Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology." After this endeavor, a literary piece entitled "Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language" was released in 1982. In the introductory section of the cited book (1982), the author emphasizes the text in "Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology" and discusses that the preceding book focused on the early religious language, simulations, parables, and stories that provided the initial terminology related to religious truth. The text highlights the various literary genres that have originated from the initial manifestations of Christianity, including poetry, novels, and autobiographies. (McFague, 1982, p. ix) She argues "I wrote this book as a contribution to the theological dialogue. I wrote this piece with a deliberate approach to understand what might result if a metaphorical landscape were explored regularly and comprehensively. When viewed in the light of how metaphors become models, the relativity and obviousness of metaphorical thinking, and its inherent norm-breaking and transformative nature, the relationship between religious and theological language can be seen as, at least in part, an intellectual and rational experience. How will it appear? Is this approach to navigating the complicated narrative of Christ's parables consistent with modern-day and Christian thinking principles? Does it steer clear of the idolatry and textualism that afflict the majority of religious languages and offer a means of making religion more relevant to those who lack access to traditional religious language? These are some of the issues that I have attempted to address with my intellectual and rational expertise. (McFague, 1982, pp. x and xi) Explaining how we can practically use metaphors,



McFague writes: Indeed, "a metaphor is seeing something else, pretending 'this' is 'that' because we don't know how to talk about 'this'. Metaphoric thinking means considering a string of similarities between two objects, different events, or anything about which we know one of them better than the other and using the better-known example to talk about the other." (McFague, 1982, p. 15)

McFague defines metaphor as the combination of two disparate manifestations of a being and their conceptual relationships. It is expressed as the explicit use of a term outside of its natural context by realizing or generating the likeness of entities that have not yet been known to exist. (1982, McFague, p. 36)

The phrase "chess game war" is her go-to example. (1982, McFague, p. 37)

In this metaphor, the two very different concepts of war and chess are mingled in a way that makes them difficult to distinguish. There is no need to incorporate and organize the metaphor with qualifiers in it because such identification is, to put it simply, nonsensical. For instance, "War is a little like chess." However, despite their true differences, the similarities between them have not yet been identified. (2012, Rev. Richard Hainsworth, p. 32) Every manner of life, culture, speech pattern, style of thinking, and body of information should contain a metaphor. The subject of metaphor is seen as indispensable. Metaphors cannot be discussed in any other way.

This is not a disregard; rather, it is a way in which language and thought are activities. Metaphor is described by McFague as "an assertion or judgment of similarity between two thoughts in permanent tension with one another" (1982, McFague, p. 37). Metaphors emphasize a similarity that both "is" and "isn't," as McFague emphasizes frequently. Every metaphor eventually falls apart, but what happens in religious language when I'm permitted to think of the world as God's body while still knowing God to be a friend, mother, and lover? The salient aspect to consider is that metaphors exert a mutual influence on one another and are not characterized by a fixed state but rather by a dynamic relationship that creates tension. Two elements that together comprise the feature of "is and is not" are unusual and stunning enough to produce this tension. Additionally, these two elements are mutually transformational, and through metaphor, they essentially acquire meaning and transcend their elements. Nelson Goodman (1906-1988) argued that, on the one hand, a metaphor can be likened to a child, while on the other hand, it can be compared to an elderly person. (1982, McFague, p. 40) Mother, lover, and friend are all metaphors that imply a connection that is inclusive, nonhierarchical, and reciprocal. According to McFague, the most precise way to describe the relationship between God and the world in contemporary times is through the use of metaphor. Specifically, the metaphor of the world as the body of God accurately conveys God's divine presence in the world. This metaphor emphasizes the inherent relationship and interdependence between God and all of His creation, rather than positioning God as a mediator of power. This phenomenon engenders dispersion and inclusivity for all entities, transcending the boundaries of human existence to encompass all life forms while simultaneously dismantling prevailing imperialistic and triumphalist metaphors. (Pike, Megan, 2008, p. 5)

2.2. Metaphorical Theology according to Sally McFague

Sally McFague, a theologian of the Protestant tradition, has employed a distinctive approach of self-imposed constraints in the development of her theological framework. She eschewed the conventional approach of numerous theologians to position herself within a diverse array of theological research domains. To a certain degree, her focus has been solely on the advancement of a "mediational" theology, which she has labeled "metaphorical theology." (Q. Hugh J. Gwyn, 2011, p. 11)

McFague's preference lies in the utilization of metaphorical language, which primarily involves the application of similes, as opposed to analogical language. The author's employment of metaphorical vision in theology enables a departure from conventional patriarchal patterns and paradigms. McFague's book "God's Models: The Relationship between God and the World" reveals the patriarchal model that characterizes the relationship between God and the world. The author proceeds to identify the limitations of the aforementioned model and proposes alternative scenarios that may address contemporary issues, including God as a mother, a lover, or a friend. (Sahinidou, Ioanna, 2015, p. 18) The issue of metaphorical theology is a significant and intricate matter that requires careful consideration of both metaphor and model. What are the characteristics of theological metaphors,



and what is the rationale behind referring to theology as metaphorical? A metaphor is a linguistic device that involves the use of a word or phrase in a manner that deviates from its literal meaning. The phenomenon of ascribing a term or concept to a context where it does not strictly apply is evident in various instances, such as the utilization of the term "arm" to refer to the lateral support of a chair, the metaphorical comparison of war to a game of chess, and the attribution of the paternal role to God. (McFague, 1987, p. 33; McFague, 1982, p. 37) Metaphorical theology is founded on its frameworks, rather than being an independent structural belief. (ibid., 1987, p. xi)

Its duties include literary criticism, categorizing the relationships between metaphors, models, pictures, and concepts, recognizing the importance of models in religion, in particular models in Christian traditions, and doing research on adaptable and transformational models. (ibid, p.28)

McFague establishes fundamental concepts, techniques, and strategies in the initial segment of her work, which serve as the basis for various theological forms of argumentation. What is the methodology involved in the creation and processing of these models and images? What measures can be taken to prevent the recurrence of past issues? McFague conducts research and engages in the reconstruction of the conceptualization of God as a paternal figure to address the aforementioned inquiries. Numerous feminist critics have expressed their concerns regarding the patriarchal assumptions and implications associated with this term. However, McFague takes a step further. The magnitude of the issue surpasses that of patriarchy as the concept of God the Father (God in the role of a father figure) has transformed into an object of worship, thereby obstructing its metaphorical underpinnings. The evolution of the father's role into a patriarchal system is a significant and unsettling outcome of the idolization of the traditional model. (ibid, p.9)

Using patriarchal language and metaphors is viewed as a threat to global survival. This vocabulary can cover the development and continuation of life on our planet in addition to being irrelevant, idolatrous, and oppressive to many. In my opinion, the fear of a nuclear holocaust represents the true initiative of our time, compelling all positive measures, including theological speculation, to be undertaken. (ibid., 1987, p. xi & x)

There is no greater degree of risk than this. However, there are other ways to learn about metaphors and parables. McFague uses the tremendous depth of the Bible's imagery, which offers a variety of ways to redefine God and its spiritual relationship with people and the rest of creation, to examine transformational forms of God. The preservation of meanings and their intimate connection to obsolescence are put in tension by metaphors. (ibid., 1982, p. 136)

The inquiry that emerges pertains to whether theology in its entirety is metaphorical or whether only metaphorical theology is metaphorical. Typically, the response to this inquiry is ambiguous, as it can be affirmative or negative depending on the circumstances. According to McFague, the entirety of theology is metaphorical insofar as its language is entirely metaphorical, thereby rendering all human discourse metaphorical. Additionally, as per McFague's concept of radical monotheism, which refutes any assertion of authentic depictions or divine explanations, all theology is regarded as metaphorical. McFague refutes two perspectives: firstly, the notion that the employment of metaphor in theology diminishes all aspects of reality to a mere pastime, and secondly, the assertion that the flaw of deconstruction lies in its failure to recognize the presence of a reality that extends beyond metaphor. (ibid., 1987, p. 26)

The author posits that linguistic games can alter our perception of reality and influence our interactions with other entities, including those of the human and non-human variety. (ibid)

According to McFague, the universality of metaphor yields two outcomes. First, discourse entails that no individual can assert the presence of an unequivocal and accurate depiction of reality, thereby establishing the preeminence of their verbal expression over alternative discourses. Conversely, it does not imply that everything has advanced; it is still feasible to offer reasons for supporting one intellectual stance over another, and such judgment is vitally required. Consequently, it can be inferred that the relationship between metaphorical and non-metaphorical approaches in McFague's writings lacks clarity, given the premise that not all theology is metaphorical and not all non-metaphorical theology is unjustified. Notwithstanding, it is evident that, firstly, McFague demonstrates a willingness to engage with the matter of ecclesiastical structure and Christian doctrine

and to partake in it more broadly. Secondly, McFague perceives a sense of responsibility towards the wider community. Consequently, owing to the methodology and substance of her theological framework, as well as the social coherence that is predicated on individual engagement with the community, she recognizes the imperative of establishing a rational nexus with society. (Rev'd Richard Hainsworth, 2012, pp. 137-138)

An inquiry that arises pertains to the type of theology that is requisite for the contemporary era. McFague posits in her book "Metaphorical Theology:..." that through the examination of metaphor and parables, she has developed a theology that is infinite, experimental, indirect, flexible, symbolic, and transformative. (McFague, 1982, pp. 18-19)

The metaphor represents a considerable repository of possible interpretations. The exploration of the metaphorical representation of God's body has been a subject of inquiry in various works of McFague, both contemporary and classical, thereby paving the way for other theologians to delve into this area of study. According to McFague's book "Speech in Parables:...", the primary objective of metaphorical theology is to construct novel frameworks for religious discourse and subsequently employ theological perspectives to address political and societal issues.

The subsequent literary works authored by McFague, namely "Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Theological Language" (1982) and "Models of God: Theology for the Ecological, Nuclear Age" (1987), serve to finalize her three-part perspective on metaphorical theology. The author characterizes her approach as innovative and exploratory theology, which diverges from the prescriptive nature of systematic theology. This approach directs attention toward contemporary political and social issues, such as nuclear proliferation, environmental degradation, the loss of biodiversity, and climate change. In contrast to systematic theology, which arranges all prevailing models under a single, pivotal model, this approach differs significantly. (ibid, pp.27-28)

2.3. The Models of God in the Theological Language of Sallie McFague

McFague's second publication, titled "Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language," suggests a shift in perspective from describing God to envisioning God through the use of imagery. The fundamental aspect of providing guidance lies in the relationship and its underlying structure. The author addresses the topic of religious language, exploring its interplay with idolatry and how scientific models can be effectively translated into theological models. As stated in the preface, the author acknowledges the transition from the figurative language of metaphors and parables to the abstract language of theology. The former pertains to the establishment, while the latter pertains to the allocation of resources. (McFague, 1982, p. ix) She hoped to make it possible to track this trend, which was inspired by her Protestant heritage and borne out of her sensibility and religion. The diversity of word and religious language interpretation texts provides the answer to this problem. True religious language is a duplicate of what it communicates theologically. God is indeed Father if the Bible is to be believed. The meaning of the word and its connotations allude to God's character. (ibid, p.5) She claimed that the fact that we no longer comprehend visuals in the same way that we formerly did can partially account for this problem. Things are exactly what we call them by their names. The Father is the Almighty God. This has been the norm to the point where patriarchy now refers to dominating relationships at all levels and father is referred to as the name of God. (ibid, p.9) In the realm of theology and religious discourse, the utilization of models is of paramount significance. This is since in the absence of such models, theological theories may result in vacuous definitions that are logically linked but devoid of meaning. Furthermore, owing to the intricate nature of its focus, namely the interplay between the divine and human realms, theology necessitates a diverse array of models, resulting in the proliferation of terminologies and concepts within the theological discourse. (ibid, 105) According to McFague, models can't attain the status of a theological concept. The proposal put forth is to assess theological models based on their internal coherence, inclusiveness, ability to withstand anomalies, and ability to reconcile conflicting factors. (ibid, 139-140) In her epistemology, she aligns with realist critics and highlights that the abundance of models may lead one to perceive model selection as a subjective preference, akin to selecting a car based on personal taste. Certain models hold greater significance and can be supported through argumentation. (ibid, p.132) Models are essential and enduring representations that establish a crucial connection with parables, which

are also metaphorical. Language plays a crucial role in the formulation of a conceptual framework that facilitates the systematic analysis and evaluation of the representations of a given cultural heritage. Metaphorical theology endeavors to scrutinize the interplay among metaphor, model, and concept to validate prevailing and foundational models as being correct but not necessarily precise, and to unearth other correct models that have been repressed due to cultural, political, and social factors. Metaphorical theology emphasizes models, as they serve to maintain the contradictory metaphors that underlie religious language as a whole. These models, much like concepts, adapt the representations of a given tradition in a manner that renders them intelligible as patterns and models for life. (ibid, p.103) It is important to acknowledge that theology cannot be restricted solely to its primary sources. Hence, metaphorical theology must draw upon representations, metaphors, and parables, utilizing conceptual frameworks and primarily relying on religious archetypes. The utilization of these elements is imperative to progress from figurative language to a more abstract and theoretical vocabulary. The concept of God the Father can be interpreted as a metaphorical construct that serves as a cognitive model to aid in the formation of one's thoughts regarding an elusive subject, namely God. (ibid, p.23) Using metaphors in conjunction with models both protects and enhances. To grow God's metaphors, metaphors need models, but models also need to construct metaphors because models often make the aim into a contest. Model interpretation and literature present a risk. The priorities of many religious traditions are represented by the interpretations and decisions made to comprehend this model. It is vital to apply conceptual interpretation and criticism to maintain balance. Four duties are outlined and explained by McFague for her figurative theology:

- a) To understand the centrality of models in the Christian tradition
- b) For literary criticism of authentic and unique models
- c) To draw relationships between metaphors, models, and concepts
- d) To examine the possibilities of changeable and transformative models

The objective of the author in this particular context is to critically examine the conventional pedagogical tradition that centers solely on the Greek Gospel perspective in the discourse surrounding Christ as a parable. (ibid, p.28)

The author adeptly portrays a sound model that is consistently and accurately depicted, while also being distinct enough from its primary subject to provide valuable insights. Stated differently, it possesses the requisite attributes and spatial proximity to yield desired outcomes. The author adeptly portrays a sound model that is consistently and accurately depicted, while also being distinct enough from its primary subject to provide valuable insights. Stated differently, it possesses the requisite attributes and spatial proximity to yield desired outcomes. (ibid, p.69) McFague identifies two primary hazards associated with models. One potential hazard is the tension between the model and the process of model creation. Consequently, individuals are confined by biased, absolutist, authoritarian cognitive frameworks. The second point pertains to our lack of awareness regarding our existence within a model. This is the universal pattern. (ibid, p.74)

Nevertheless, the models are not conclusive; rather, they serve as a means to advance one's contemplation. Due to this rationale, they are commonly referred to as working models or hypotheses. In extensive research, it is customary to employ multiple working models as a standard practice. Over time, this assemblage of models transforms into a representative sample. (ibid, p.82)

This problem suggests that a model of God as a father can be one approach to explain human-divine interactions. Mother and father models are equally valuable because they are both a part of the fundamental framework of divine and human relationships, and they even strengthen one another. The utilization of models is crucial for the successful transference of metaphors into concepts, particularly within the intricate domain of theology. It is not possible for a finite collection of models to be adequate. It is crucial to bear in mind the objective, prominence, and concentration of McFague's metaphorical theology when scrutinizing the function of metaphors and similes and the intrinsic significance of models. The objective is to identify how the fundamental language of parables and the use of Christ as allegory, characterized by tension, relativity, wandering, and transformation, has been conserved across various translations of theological language throughout different historical periods. The crux of the matter lies in examining the interplay between metaphor, model, and concept to

validate the prevailing and foundational models of truth, which are not to be taken literally, and to uncover other suitable models that have been marginalized due to cultural, political, and social factors. Emphasis is placed on models as they alleviate tension and uphold the fundamental tenets of religious language, thereby facilitating the organization of a tradition's forms. (ibid, p. 103)

2.4. Models of God in McFague's Theology concerning Mother, Lover, and Friend

Do McFague's models of God follow her theory and objectives and are they internally consistent? Can they participate in her current efforts to reform the Christian tradition? Models of God are presented by McFague in three different ways: as a mother, a lover, and a friend. She first discusses how God fits into the model, then uses the model's explanation of love, and then discusses ethics to defend the conclusion. (Rev'd Richard Hainsworth, 2012, p.191)

That is to say, in the first phase, God is viewed as the mother, lover, and friend of the world, which is metaphorically modeled as the body of God, rather than the mother, lover, and friend of the essence of a single human being or, for the sake of illustration, my mother, my love, and my friend. (ibid, p.192)

McFague attempts to comprehend the nature of religious language and the usage of metaphors in related themes and models during her thinking. She is generally aware that human intellect and language are built on metaphors and metaphorical thinking. She also recognizes the value of imaginative language as a foundation for understanding theological language as well as religious language. She also deduces how metaphors support a particular aspect of the general symbolic patterns or manifestations of religious experience in a particular context. (Annalet van schalkwyk, 2008, pp.208-209)

According to McFague, the kingdom or administration of God, rather than God the Father, serves as Christianity's primary metaphor. This is crucial because it informs how she views other people's behavior. McFague can replace the prevalent metaphors of father, king, and creator with ones that are more relatable in our day and age by laying the groundwork for her metaphorical theology. She advocates for a new sensibility for our time, which she refers to as the ecological and nuclear age, in Models of God. Sensitivity and responsibility encompass all living forms and accept the interconnection of all life. (McFague, 1987, p.3) In the conclusion of her second publication (*Metaphorical Theology...*), the author acknowledged the necessity of parental models that are capable of equitably balancing individuals irrespective of familial or gender-based affiliations. (ibid, p.187) She described God as a friend, which is a metaphor with a lot to say. Jesus acknowledges us as his friends and welcomes us to the table to dine with him as friends. (ibid, p.181) She reexamines that undertaking in theology for the ecological, nuclear age in her third book, "Models of God," and situates it in a broader theological perspective. She finally provides a relevant and timely setting for her theology. (McFague, 1987) She is growing more concerned that the prevalent theological models may not only lead to idolatry and irrelevance but also threaten the survival of life as we know it. She was particularly worried by how the triumphant Judeo-Christian representations of the relationship between God and the world served to reinforce the very real fear of nuclear war. In her third book, she argues that it is useless to turn to antiquated metaphors and models or to retreat entirely into an abstract language. With the models of God as the world's mother, lover, and friend as well as with the idea that the entire universe serves as God's body, she resolves to attempt and experience this problem. (ibid, p.xi) These models by themselves are of particular significance as an illustration tool, and once more we see the relationship between creation and God. Together, they represent the Trinity—the God of Love—as the Mother of Divine Love, the Lover—Eros (the face of the winged child), and the Lover—as a friend—loving and cherished. On a very intimate level, these are strong images. McFague wants us to think of ourselves as gardeners, caregivers, mothers and fathers, stewards, confidants, lovers, priests, wives, and friends to create new models of who we are. (ibid, p.13) She suggests that by presenting new models with the primary power of love at their core, she was able to defy the current power and rebuild the dominating models. Because of what is seen to be our failure to connect God and the world in our modern or post-modern era, she suggested this issue. This is the outcome because there isn't a fictional image. (ibid, p.31) The requisite course of action entails the reconstruction of theology through the utilization of a structural and metaphorical theological framework. To accomplish this, she formulates a pair of

inquiries: What is the stance of metaphorical theology regarding the legitimacy of scripture, tradition, and experience as sources of authority? Secondly, how does one interpret the evident connections with the contemporary Christian paradigm? McFague aims to present a fundamental framework that is relevant to the current context. Ultimately, the author desires to redefine and elevate the comprehension of the interconnection among divinity, humanity, and the natural world through the use of mythological elements. (Cancienne, M.P, 2009, p.90) McFague contends that all three of the elements are records of experiences in response to the first query. The Bible is a collection of experiences about how God interacted with the world, and tradition is a collection of reflections on those stories that are connected to the author's encounters with God. They provide a vast variety of metaphors, models, and insights as a source of metaphorical theology. (McFague, 1987, p.44) She approaches this problem from an evolutionary and ecological perspective of interdependence with the capacity for euthanasia. Therefore, it is inappropriate to discuss God's death and resurrection, one's sin and the redemptive atonement, eternal life, etc. when giving the Christian response. (ibid, p.45) Another issue that McFague brings up is how this is possible if God is always with us. The idea put forth by McFague is the metaphor of the world as the body of God, who is present everywhere and at all times. (ibid, p.60) The notion being conveyed is not that of a veiled or oblique manifestation of the divine, but rather a means of conceptualizing it. It is not feasible to abandon the use of metaphor. McFague employs a metaphorical approach to acknowledge the relevance of the gospel in contemporary times. If we were to consider the world as a manifestation of God's corporeal (body) and spiritual being, or as a symbol thereof, it raises questions about how God and humans ought to react to it. (ibid, p.61) The significance of models and metaphors extends beyond theological conceptualization. The primary objective of theology is to facilitate our conscientious, insightful, and responsible response to God's summons. The author asserts that the significance of metaphors should be duly acknowledged at the level of their function, specifically in terms of the imaginative representation of God and the world that they construct. (ibid, p.67) If one were to view the world as the body of God, and as a symbol, it would not merely be a literary work. Sacred texts hold a unique significance as a conduit for the manifestation of divine presence, however, it is important to acknowledge that the world also serves as a dwelling place for God.

McFague raises a significant inquiry concerning her proposed framework, namely, whether the metaphor of the world is founded on the coherence of existence. The response provided is unambiguous. This statement would hold validity in the absence of any additional metaphors about individual representation. The existence of a body implies the existence of everything. However, it can be argued that this particular model is integrated and thus can be more precisely characterized as an existential unity. This perspective posits a fundamental connection between God and the world, wherein all entities are inherently grounded in God and no entity exists independently of God. This does not imply that God is limited to these attributes. (ibid, p.72) Despite being everywhere, God is not everything. McFague focused on the need for metaphors of the personal agent for the metaphor of the world as the body of God during her address. She makes three crucial suggestions: that God is a mother, a lover, and a friend. But why these, and why metaphors about myself? Because patriarchal, unipolar, triumphalist metaphors are fundamentally about how we run our lives, the answer to the first question is yes. Much more profound themes about how we live and how well we live are covered in these personal metaphors. His response to the second question is that when we use personal metaphors to describe God, we are not describing a being that is connected to the outer world, but rather, we are imagining a model of the most intricate aspect of the entire world, based on our model. (ibid, p.82) McFague emphasizes that humans were made in the imagination rather than by reducing God to us. We have arrived at a time when we must participate in the world on our own. These metaphors make direct allusions to the present, saying that God is a mother, lover, and friend who is always there. The last and least of all creation is the Christian gospel's portrayal as an incredibly radical and surreal act of love. (ibid, p. 91) This love is imaginative, supportive, and solid. The metaphor of the parents (father and mother) stands in for the metaphor of creative love, the Son, our Beloved, for saving love, and the Spirit, the Friend, for enduring love. Overall, these models demonstrate that the world's creation—which fervently adores the bounds of God's existence—is God's



most important activity. (ibid, p.93)

2.4.1. God as a Mother

Why do you use the metaphor of the mother? Because only man was not created in God's image when He created man and woman in the beginning. Naturally, this problem leads to the female gender and ignores the father's implied male gender. If we use ourselves as a standard for discussing God, gender-neutral language is nonexistent. (ibid, p.98) Nevertheless, parents are complementary to one another, but this does not entail recognizing stereotypes. According to McFague, if we only use male pronouns, we are practicing idolatry. Additionally, if we wish to talk about God in a way that is precise, intimate, and free from idolatry, we must use both feminine and masculine language. This does not mean, however, that we should be passive about God's active or powerful traits. (ibid, p.99) McFague posits the attribution of human qualities solely to God, wherein the metaphor of God as a mother is presented in tandem with that of God as a father. God is portrayed as a mother in the model, and God's love as divine love, creation, and justice are all addressed. Since God is a mother, she beckons us back and longs for our reunion, so her love is not entirely unconditional. We are valued, desired, and appropriate in a certain way. It is fortunate that you exist, she said at the time of our transition. (ibid, p.102) According to McFague's citation of Tillich, the impetus behind life is love, which is oriented toward all other entities in its significance. (ibid) The present analysis highlights how the metaphor of God's love creates a conducive environment for individuals to exhibit concern towards the world, which is currently facing the risk of nuclear holocaust, and aspire to attain a state of unity with it. God, regarded as the maternal figure of the world, exhibits a vested concern in all manifestations of existence. He has a keen interest in the imperative of conserving numerous life forms. Hence, it is imperative to direct our attention not solely toward living entities but also toward the entirety of our world. The versions of creation described in the book of Genesis involve two crucial ideas: hierarchy, which is part of creation that is subject to spirituality, and the idea that God created from nothing. These ideas have elevated humans above nature and separated us from anything that is not like God. This is the body to which spirituality is subject that God has made hierarchies out of nothing. These viewpoints have elevated humans above nature and outside of everything that is entirely unrelated to God. Two key ideas are contained in the various narratives of creation in Genesis: first, that God formed hierarchies out of nothing. The body that submits to spirituality is this one. These ideas have elevated humans above nature and separated us from anything that is not like God. (ibid, p.109) The world acquires a body as a word of God's existence and a manifestation of God, in contrast to how God produces as a mother, which is neither an intellectual nor artistic work. (ibid, p.110) The metaphor of birth, according to McFague, is more beneficial for our world than the prevalent picture and is also closely related to the Christian faith. This implies that the universe and God are neither wholly similar nor wholly dissimilar; rather, "it exists and it does not exist. It also indicates the reversal and duality of body and mind, body and soul, nature and humanity. (ibid, p.111)

2.4.2. God as a Lover

The metaphor of God as a lover is clear if we consider that God loves the world. If this is the case, God loves us and the world is God's beloved. The prevalent metaphor demonstrates how God's love utterly disregards the worth of the beloved and is unresponsive. We are still deeply loved, as Jesus demonstrated. He died fervently because he was in love. However, God believes that love is contagious. However, God views love as a contagious emotion that affects others. The most common type of human relationship is love. We can deeply experience this. Human love is not an everyday trait; rather, it is one of our many characteristics. Therefore, it is odd that only mystics frequently speak to God as a lover. In summary, is it not being posited that the prevalent and paramount form of human love is unsuitable for conveying certain facets of the association between God and the World? (ibid, p.126) The use of metaphor cannot be concealed as it conveys insights into God's attitude towards humanity. This implies that human beings possess inherent worth and significance from the very instant of their inception. The reason for our belovedness is rooted in our intrinsic worth, which extends beyond the individual to encompass the entirety of the natural world. Hence, we are cherished as a sentient component of the cosmos. Our popularity extends across all systems of existence. Consequently, the utilization of the metaphorical representation of God as a lover encompasses vast



dimensions, encompassing not solely humanity and other living organisms, but also the entirety of the creation process. We exhibit benevolent behavior and develop romantic feelings towards our significant other. This represents our quest for a higher power. Our pursuit of God can be characterized as an expression of Eros, encompassing both desire and passion. The speaker asserts that in contemporary times, it is crucial to underscore the inherent worth of our world, and in this context, Eros as a form of valuable love holds significance in both God and human love. (ibid, p.130)

The matter at hand is of fundamental significance as it pertains to the salvific nature of God's actions. Specifically, God's role as a lover is manifested in the act of creating a cohesive entity or merging with that which is deemed alluring and valuable, rather than in the redemption and emancipation of that which is noncompliant and devoid of worth. The desire of Eros for unification with the world may indicate a deficiency in his current state. The utilization of the term "Eros" to depict this love suggests that the world holds significance and that it is indispensable to God. Furthermore, the attainment of salvation is contingent upon the merging of the cherished world with the beloved that is God. (ibid, p.131) Because it would have joined the world outside of God if God had not regarded it and did not value it? We are aware of having a lover, and we can deliberately and solemnly respond to that love. This is the intensity and insistence of God's expression of the dynamic for us, for God to abide among us. Then why? The model of God the Creator as a mother illustrates the idea of the existential rite of sanctification, according to which the world will eventually resemble God because it was created from God's existence. The cult of personal holiness is expressed through the model of God the Savior as a lover: the world has a receptive connection with God. (ibid, p.135) During the initial rite of sanctification, the entirety of the world possesses the potential to serve as a manifestation of God. The second ritual of sanctification serves to demonstrate that individuals, being made in the image of God (*imago dei*), possess the capacity to serve as a source of inspiration for the relationship between God and the world as a lover responding to his beloved. According to McFague, God's activity as a Savior and a Lover is to mend the rift that sin has caused between Him and His creation. Since we rarely intentionally and consciously act against God, He does not define sin as such. It almost always works against God's creation, other species, and our species. It is the yearning to master good and evil, life and death to become like God. This is detrimental to God. (ibid, pp.138-139) The nuclear threat is a far stronger and more immediate context for human guilt if the environmental condition is a general one. The threat of nuclear destruction exists right now. Therefore, the sin is not arrogance or unbelief but rather the refusal to engage in a relationship, the refusal to experience the love of our loving God, and the refusal to experience the love of all creatures that love God. (ibid, 139) As a lover, God must also deal with the intricacy of the created world as well as sin and the miseries that follow from sin. It is somewhat understandable to tolerate widespread misery brought on by sin, but what kind of anguish results from fundamental natural processes? Salvation is not something that a person performs only once. The implicit concept of Christ's incarceration and atoning death contrasts with the understanding of salvation in the model of God as a lover. According to McFague, this represents the harmony of God's body, which manifests God's love in various ways and at various times. In this way, God's creation is being sanctified. We cooperate with God to foster the ongoing healing of each of our global bodies. (ibid, p.143) This statement does not explicate the paradigm of Jesus, but rather elucidates God's love for humanity, extending beyond the individual to encompass the entirety of the world. It can be argued that individuals play an active role in achieving their salvation. (ibid, p.145)

2.4.3. God as a Friend

Instead of employing the usual terminology of the Trinity, McFague suggests a model of God as a friend in the findings section of *Metaphorical Theology* and investigates its theological and semantic implications. Undertaking such an action is likely to elicit criticism and require thorough investigation based on sound reasoning. (McFague, 1982, pp.190-192) The author poses inquiries of both a practical and theoretical nature regarding this novel model. What will be the extent of God's power and authority in the capacity of a friend? Is it possible for God to protect both humanity and the world? What are the appropriate methods for engaging in worship of God, who is regarded as a friend? (ibid, p.182) She summons more God models in addition to the friend model as a result of her planning and thought. Her next book's subject will be entirely devoted to the development and defense of new



models. What if we think of God as our mother, our lover, or our friend? Are they all distinctive on their own or ought they to be combined? The list comprises additional models such as liberation, healing, judge, and referee, among others. (ibid, p.166) The author enumerates a comprehensive roster of theologians, among them Jürgen Moltmann, who have developed diverse conceptualizations of God, including the mother aspect. (ibid, pp. 169,174,176,177) Moltmann's exegesis aligns with this model, positing that the demise and resurrection of Jesus as a friend epitomize the identical model. According to Jürgen Moltmann, they serve as a metaphor for God's self-disclosure; a God who endures agony on our behalf, thereby beckoning us to emulate Him and undergo suffering alongside God and for the benefit of others. As per Moltmann's perspective, an instance of amicable association with God can be exemplified as follows: A friend of God does not subsist beneath His shadow to a greater extent than God Himself but rather coexists with God and within His being. An individual who experiences both the sorrow and joy of God has achieved a state of unity with God. (ibid, p.181) In the context of friendship, it can be argued that God endows us with the virtue of *Philia*, which is characterized by its steadfastness and ability to foster companionship. Defining and determining it poses a challenging task. Nevertheless, individuals have the autonomy to select their friends. According to McFague, the fundamental nature of friendship involves the voluntary bonding of two individuals in a reciprocal relationship. (ibid, p.162) We typically chose friends because we get along with them, which is normal. It combines both esteem and devotion. We can refer to this combination as *philia*. It is a powerful tie that is comparatively free from issues that can hurt other loves, such as shame, fear, jealousy, and rage. As a result, it has three paradoxical characteristics: even if youngsters can form friendships instinctively, bonding happens freely, it indicates inclusivity in the connection, and it demands full capacities. (ibid) One is entirely free to love; the foundation of trust, along with dependability, stability, and loyalty, is freedom. However, this isn't only excitement and joy from the other side; it's also excitement and joy from the shared perspective of friends who are standing together, as opposed to lovers who are attracted to each other in the face. Because everyone has friends, and because interests and viewpoints are frequently shared for the same reasons as friends, friendship is inescapable and universal. (ibid, 162-163) But how does someone, particularly a child, bring adults' qualities to a friendship? The nature of friendship, which requires conflict and reciprocity to start and grow friendships, is the source of McFague's response. Interdependence is thus possible even in young children. McFague laid the groundwork for us to develop a friendship with our Creator in this way. According to her, if God is a friend of the world, He is committed to it. He can be trusted and we should never betray Him. Not only He loves the world but also has a vision for its well-being. As such, we, as a department Special body - *imago dei* - as friends of the world, are invited to join in that vision and work toward its realization. (ibid, pp. 165) With this action, God is calling and inviting us to a unique connection in which there is a shared vision and where friendship and love, an all-encompassing friendship called *philia* (affection-love), are at its core. Typically, communal dining and the sharing of a meal is a customary practice among individuals who share a similar perspective, although not exclusively but completely to such a group. According to McFague, God as the mother expresses a positive sentiment towards the existence of humanity by stating "It is good that you exist." God as a lover expresses "You are precious beyond imagination," and God as a friend expresses "Let us all break our fast together in friendship and happiness". (ibid, p.168) She continues, "Divine love determines the right as it should be for all the various forms of life." Eros highlights the importance of various forms, their freedom and completeness, and how, with God's assistance, there is satisfaction for all forms of life as a partner and a source of new life. McFague is having difficulty with this. She argued that the church has decided to use the soul model to identify God, the preserver, but I wish to argue that in the ecological and nuclear eras, the friend or companion model is preferable. (ibid, p.169) Her issue is that the soul initially manifests as a formless, hazy, and colorless entity. Even though the soul has taken the place of the spirit, this still represents a weak member of the Trinity. Second, the soul, which serves as an illustration of God's omnipresence, is mostly constrained to divine activity in connection to human existence, shielding the most important region of the world from God's unfailing love. Finally, it leans toward what McFague terms an existentialist and individualistic view of Christianity. Her subsequent claim that the Feast of Pentecost—a holiday commemorating the arrival

of the Holy Spirit on Jesus' followers after his resurrection—is a setting for God's ongoing love is somewhat unexpected. The argument presented is somewhat unexpected as it proceeds to assert that the enduring love of God is situated within the framework of the Feast of Pentecost, a Christian celebration commemorating the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the followers of Jesus after his resurrection. To clarify, Jesus undergoes crucifixion, after which he manifests to the apostles, providing them with an opportunity to commence a fresh endeavor aimed at comprehending Jesus' teachings and actions, specifically his revelation of his father. The inquiry pertains to the nature of Pentecost, specifically concerning whether it constitutes the realization of God's commitment to send the Holy Spirit of Jesus as a perpetual presence among humanity. Nonetheless, there exists a critique regarding the instruction about the perceived constraint of this persistent *philia* (love) solely to individuals belonging to the genuine human species. In recent times, the church has emphasized the importance of our responsibilities towards the entire world. According to McFague, the world serves as the locus for encountering God, thereby implying the ubiquity of God's presence and the universality of God's sovereignty. She posits that a novel approach to meditation is necessary, one that involves the utilization of tangible images and focused consideration of their unique attributes, worth, and distinctive features. The ultimate goal of this method is to reach a point where ruminating on the irreparable losses and harm incurred by these images becomes intolerable. This is a form of supplication for the world as God's body that we, in our roles as mothers, fathers, companions, and friends of the world, are enjoined to reiterate and implement. Due to its divine nature, the body of God is considered to be awe-inspiring, wondrous, and enigmatic. (ibid, 168-187)

3. CONCLUSION

McFague emphasizes the structural aspect of Christian metaphors and proposes novel metaphors, particularly for God, in her theology. She anticipates that these metaphors will be influential in motivating mainstream Christians to engage in environmental activism, given the perilous state of the planet. McFague proposes a shift from a transcendental theology that emphasizes salvation to a creation theology that emphasizes divine thought. To achieve this, she employs both personal and less personal metaphors, such as conceiving the world as God's body and depicting God as a mother, lover, and friend, thereby offering a vision of life. According to McFague, the conception of God as a mere being does not diminish the sacredness of the natural world. However, neglecting creation theology limits the extent of God's omnipresence and reduces His magnitude.

The author identifies herself as a mystic and a follower of Unitarian Christianity. She asserts that the concept of God as a being, regardless of the extent of His attributes such as infinity, eternity, comprehensiveness, excellence, power, or supernatural nature, is not a belief that she or anyone else can subscribe to. God is either everything or nothing. Alternatively, God can be more accurately described as the embodiment of reality or self-existence. If this were not the case, there would exist a higher or transcendent entity beyond God, which would be God. McFague suggests that Christians should consider conceptualizing God in terms of mother, love, friend, and spirit (soul). The author posits that the aforementioned are metaphors that serve to displace the notion of God as a discrete entity, in favor of a perspective that characterizes God as an omnipresent and all-encompassing entity, as well as a constant presence of love that pervades evolutionary processes. The various metaphors utilized portray God as distinct species, each embodying an inherent connection to all things, akin to a maternal, amorous, and amicable presence, and as a fundamental aspect of one's being. Each of these conceptualizations represents God as a personalized force of love, yet not in the form of a human being. According to McFague, she believes that God can be characterized as a person, however, God does not fit into a person. The assertion that God embodies love connotes a personal attribute. However, I posit that metaphors such as spirit, life, light, water, and truth, which are expressed in impersonal or less personal manners, are also crucial in conveying one's belief. From a theological perspective, love and prosperity are considered by some to be analogous to God, as they are believed to be the driving forces behind the flourishing of the created world. The text posits the existence of a metaphorical entity, wherein God is envisioned as a personal embodiment of love, taking on the roles of a mother, lover, and friend. Subsequently, this conception of God is further characterized as



a less personal manifestation, taking on the form of God as Spirit (soul).

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