

MORE PRAISE FOR  
CAROL P. CHRIST AND *SHE WHO CHANGES*

“In response to a perceived stagnation in the world of religious and spiritual practices, in Jewish and Christian sects and in the goddess movement, Christ seeks to uproot traditional ideas and open up possibilities for further participation and identification among women with God. The author encourages those of the Judeo-Christian faiths especially to think about how spiritual identity can be renewed by thinking about God as female.”

—*Women’s Review of Books*

“Christ’s work is a distinctive contribution to the body of feminist work, one that certainly stimulates the reader to examine her own beliefs and really begin to figure out wherein her assumptions lie.”

—Stephanie Hiller, *Awakened Woman*

“As a man who considered himself a feminist, Hartshorne would have been delighted with Christ’s interpretation and development of his thought. We Americans are urgently in need of a wider community of those who share a countercultural vision with extensive practical implications, a vision that can become a fundamental alternative to the extreme patriarchy that now governs our national behavior. May Christ’s book contribute to the emergence of this community. I would also recommend *She Who Changes* as a lucid introduction to process thought.”

—John B. Cobb, Jr., founding member of the Center for Process Studies and author of numerous books on process theology

“*She Who Changes* is a gift to the world. The style is clear, passionate, and utterly compassionate, building a sturdy bridge between process theology and feminist thought that is valuable beyond calculation. After reading the book, I too will call myself a process theologian.”

—Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, author of *Women, Men, and the Bible* and founding member of the Evangelical & Ecumenical Women’s Caucus

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(co-edited with Judith Plaskow)

# SHE WHO CHANGES

RE-IMAGINING THE  
DIVINE IN THE WORLD

CAROL P. CHRIST

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SHE WHO CHANGES

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED WITH LOVE TO THE MEMORY OF

CHARLES HARTSHORNE

AND

RACHEL CARSON

AND TO THE LIVING INSPIRATION OF

JOHN B. COBB, JR.

*Once this rocky coast beneath me was a plain of sand; then the sea rose and found a new shore line. And again in some shadowy future the surf will have ground these rocks to sand and will have returned the coast to its earlier state. And so in my mind's eye these coastal forms merge and blend in a shifting, kaleidoscopic pattern in which there is not finality, no ultimate and fixed reality—earth becoming fluid as the sea itself.*

—Rachel Carson, *The Edge of the Sea*



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## PREFACE

This book is the fruit of a love affair with a philosopher who died in the year 2000 at the age of 103. Two stories suggest why I am drawn to his understanding of the world. In his fifty-fifth year, Charles Hartshorne, a professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago and a lifelong birdwatcher, went back to school and engaged in reading and field research in order to answer the question, “Do birds enjoy singing?”<sup>1</sup> Hartshorne knew that the answer to this question is an unqualified yes. He did not deny that birds sing to attract mates and to control territory as ornithologists allege, but he was certain that birdsong would not be so beautiful and so varied if birds did not also love to sing. This argument is part of several larger ones in his work: that life is meant to be enjoyed (in the widest sense) and that human beings (and God) are not the only beings in the universe with the capacity for joy. I must confess: I fell in love with this man who loved birds so much that he went back to school to prove that they feel joy in living.

In a collection of essays published in the one hundredth year of his life, Charles Hartshorne made only one change in his earlier work. I will let him speak for himself: “I now regret having for so long followed the routine practice of using the male gender in referring to deity; also in taking man as the name of the species. I became profeminist more than seven decades ago [in the 1920s] but began showing this linguistically less than two decades ago. I have tried to purify some of the offending passages.”<sup>2</sup> I must confess, I fell in love with this man who cared so much about treating

women fairly that he went back to his old essays and corrected them in his ninety-ninth year.

I heard Charles Hartshorne speak only once. I received a single letter from him, written by hand when he was over one hundred years old, clarifying one of his philosophical positions. Thus, I know him primarily through his writing. Hartshorne was a small man with a heart large enough to imagine freedom, love, creativity, and beauty as the guiding principles of all life in the universe, bold enough to argue that these principles apply to other animals and, in some respect, even to the cells and atoms that make up our bodies and the world body.

Having dedicated my career up to this point to the attempt to create a female train of thought,<sup>3</sup> I am quite surprised to find myself waxing eloquent about a male philosopher, white and dead, old enough to have been my grandfather. When I ask myself how this happened, I find myself responding that Charles Hartshorne's understanding of God as the most relational of all relational beings and as the most sympathetic of all sympathetic powers in the universe is amazingly compatible with my feminist longings. If a feminist philosopher is one who assumes that women are (fully equal) human beings and who takes embodiment, relationality, and embeddedness in nature for granted, then Hartshorne is a feminist philosopher. I believe his ideas have much to commend themselves to feminists interested in religious questions.

These brief reflections indicate why I am drawn to the work of the man who was known as America's greatest living metaphysician when he died. What they cannot convey is the joy I have felt, and the opening of my heart to the world that occurred while reading Hartshorne's thoughts about the love of God for the world, "a love divine, all loves excelling."<sup>4</sup>