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Process Theology – Why and What?

Process Theology is now quite fashionable, yet many people have little idea why it was introduced or what it is about. Charles Hartshorne and others have written extensively on the subject but much is difficult to understand. In this paper Dr. Pailin, Lecturer in the Philosophy of Religion at Manchester University, seeks to explain Process Theology in the simplest terms possible. The paper is based on a lecture given to the VI in 1970.

In this paper I want to consider two questions raised by 'process theology' — that is, by the theistic position which philosophers and theologians such as Charles Hartshorne, Schubert Ogden and John Cobb have developed on the basis of A. N. Whitehead's later metaphysical thought. The questions are, first, 'Why do process theologians regard the concept of God traditionally accepted in Western theology as fundamentally unsatisfactory?' and, secondly, 'What in outline is the concept of God which they advance in place of the traditional one?' Since these questions limit my concern in this paper, I will not be dealing with the question of the truth of claims about God nor with the application of process ideas to other theological doctrines.

Theology has a two-fold structure. On the one hand, as the attempt to express a religious faith, it is descriptive, subservient to the faith which it seeks to express. On the other hand, because it attempts to give a rationally coherent expression of

that faith, it is also potentially, if not actually, revisionary, seeking to 'revise' or 'modify' or 'clarify' or 'correct' the initial, crude and often implicit self-understanding of that faith in order to make it conform to its standard of rationality. Fundamental problems arise in theology when it appears that these two approaches seriously conflict — for example, when it appears that the concept of God, in order to be a rationally acceptable concept of the Supreme Being, must include notions which contradict what religious faith in God presupposes. It is because they judge that traditional Western theology is characterised by a fundamental and irresolvable tension of this sort that process theologians have attempted to develop a significantly different concept of God.

Why do Process Theologians regard the concept of God traditionally accepted in Western Theology as unsatisfactory?

The short answer to this question is that while theology, particularly when it has been aware of philosophical considerations, has traditionally talked about God as, *inter alia*, absolute, *actus purus* (pure actuality, without any potentiality), *ens realissimum* (having all perfections), eternal (in the sense of 'beyond' or 'outside time'), unchanging, unchangeable and impassible, these notions, if taken seriously, contradict any talk about God as creating, loving, pitying, deciding and acting in relation to the world. There appears, therefore, to be a basic conflict between some of the terms which theologians have traditionally considered to be essential parts of a rationally adequate description of God and the believer's faith in God as a personal being who responds to him and is a proper object of his trust. Furthermore, it is doubtful whether notions like that of *ens realissimum* as traditionally understood can be used coherently to describe any actual being since it seems that not all values are compossible.

It may be suggested, however, that this 'short answer' is a tendentious caricature. I will, therefore, add insult to injury by briefly illustrating the problem which process theologians see in traditional theology by reference to the works of three

theologians, two of whom are of considerable importance for Western theology. Their statements show how their understanding of the demands of rationality led them to views of God which are incompatible with an understanding of faith as a believer's response to God as one who personally calls, loves and forgives him.

Anselm expounds the nature of God according to the principle that God, as the greatest conceivable being, must be 'whatever it is better to be than not to be'. On this basis he concludes that God is 'just, truthful, blessed' because 'it is better to be just than not just; better to be blessed than not blessed'.¹ So far his argument seems to develop a proper understanding of God's nature. He goes on, though, on the basis of the same principle to hold that God, among other qualities, must be thought of as both 'compassionate' and 'passionless'.² God must be thought of as 'compassionate' because a non-compassionate being is, presumably, intuitively an inferior being in Anselm's judgment. At the same time, God's blessedness and his impassibility would be respectively impaired and contradicted in Anselm's judgment if God were affected by sympathy for those who suffer and thus are candidates for his 'compassion'. Anselm seeks to escape the dilemma by holding that God is 'compassionate in terms of our experience, and not compassionate in terms of [his] being'. He asserts, that is, that God is 'both compassionate' because he saves 'the wretched' and 'not compassionate, because' he is 'affected by no sympathy for wretchedness'.³ This attempt to harmonise the assertion of the compassion with that of the impassibility of God by describing God's actions as expressions of compassion while denying that there is anything in God which can correspond to our experience of compassion seems to be intrinsically unsatisfactory and contrary to the Christian's faith in God. It is intrinsically unsatisfactory because it involves the denial of an essential element of the notion of 'compassion' when the notion is applied to God. Talk of 'compassionate' acts which do not reflect some feeling of 'sympathy for the wretched' is talk which contradicts its own meaning. It is, furthermore, contrary to the Christian believer's faith (which is what Anselm is trying to explicate by *unum*

argumentum acceptable to a non-believer) in God as one who is significantly to be described as grieving over his people, loving his children like a father, pitying those who suffer and longing for the restoration of those who are lost — in the God, that is, who is described by the story of the burning bush, Hosea, the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal son, and who is held to be revealed in the suffering of Jesus. Anselm's attempt to explicate God's nature thus leads him into fundamental difficulties because he accepts, apparently without question, that as perfect God must be regarded as impassible — as unaffected by others.

Thomas Aquinas' considerable — and in some ways unfortunate — contribution to Christian theology was to attempt to express it in Aristotelian terms. His acceptance of an Aristotelian structure of thought with its underlying principles led him, in a similar way to Anselm, to conclusions about the nature of God which contradict the believer's implicit understanding of his relationship to God. In his *Summa Theologica*, for example, he concludes that 'it is evident that it is impossible for God to be in any way changeable' on the grounds that God, as 'first being', must be 'pure act, without the admixture of any potentiality' (i.e., as *actus purus*).⁴ Accordingly he claims that there are no reciprocal relations between God and his creatures by which the creature can in any way affect God. Although all creatures 'are really related to God Himself, . . . in God there is no real relation to creatures, but a relation only in idea, inasmuch as creatures are referred to Him'. Attributes of God which imply 'relation to the creature' do not describe 'any change in Him' but only 'the change of the creature; as a column is on the right of an animal, without change in itself, but by change in the animal'.⁵ This understanding of God's activity as final causality is incompatible with talk of God as deciding and acting. It implies that God cannot in any serious way be described as 'living': his existence is understandable only as unchanging self-contemplation. It is difficult to see how this picture of an utterly narcissistic being can be reconciled with the God revealed in Jesus 'who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven . . .'

Our third example is provided by William Beveridge who, in his commentary on the Thirty-Nine Articles, ⁶ seeks to show that they are 'consonant to Scripture, Reason and Fathers'. Beveridge states that these three authorities agree that God is 'not subject to, nor capable of love, hatred, joy, grief, anger, and the like, as they daily arise in us imperfect creatures; but he is always the same unmovable, unchangeable, impassible God.' ⁷ We are told, also, that 'it is impossible for God, who is a most pure act, to be subject' to 'suffering'. ⁸ Furthermore, it is argued that as God is essentially and wholly perfect, he can neither ever have been nor ever become imperfect: he cannot, therefore, change since change must be either from or to an inferior state. Although Beveridge can find some texts in the Bible and the Fathers and some reasons which apparently support his position, the view of God which he advances is basically irreconcilable with an understanding of God who knows, cherishes, cares for, responds to and aids men in their contingency and freedom.

These brief references to Anselm, Aquinas and Beveridge illustrate the view of God which has been adopted, more or less uncritically, by most Western theologians. In them we find a concept of God which seems at first to be rationally satisfactory, even rationally necessary, since any theistically adequate concept of God apparently needs, implicitly or explicitly, to conceive him as absolute, necessary, eternal and wholly perfect. A being who is not absolute or not necessary or not eternal or not perfect would not be 'God'. Nevertheless, as I have tried to illustrate, when Western theologians have drawn out the implications of such a concept of God, they have produced the concept of something that is more like an ideal value than like the living God in whom the believer enjoys the personal relationship of faith.

How has traditional Western theology reached this situation? It has reached it because, on the one hand, it has accepted, most properly, the principle of non-contradiction and, on the other hand, has been persuaded, again most properly, that some descriptions are required by any rationally adequate understanding of God. These descriptions include those of being an absolute,

necessary, unchanging, cause, infinite and eternal (and it does seem clear to me at least that as the highest possible being God must in some significant sense be held to have these qualities). Now these descriptions have their opposites: absolute - relative; necessary - contingent; unchanging - changing; cause - effect; infinite - finite; eternal - temporal. On the basis of the principle of non-contradiction, it is therefore assumed that if one of these pairs of descriptions is properly applied to God, the other is unavoidably denied to be applicable to him. Thus, if we affirm that God is absolute, then we are bound to deny that he is relative; if necessary, then not contingent; if unchanging, then not changing; if cause, then not effect, and so on. The basic problem with this position is that it makes it impossible to affirm coherently, for example, that 'God' 'loves' anything that is in some important respect a changing, self-determining free-agent — i.e., anything like the morally responsible beings which we understand ourselves to be. An absolute, unchanging being, that is, cannot enter into the changing relationship with such an object which is presupposed by significant talk about 'loving' it. 'Love' is importantly not an unchanging state: it involves responses which differ according to the differing states of its object. To take a humdrum example, a father's love for his two-year-old son will require different expressions according to whether the son is trying to draw a car, suffering from measles, expressing infantile rebellion or splashing on a beach. To say that God is in all respects unchanging is, therefore, to deny that his 'love' has the varying responsiveness which is part of the essence of the relationship of love. Similarly it can be argued that an absolute, unchanging being, such as God is traditionally understood to be, cannot coherently be said to 'know' a contingent and changing world nor to act and reveal himself in that world. The traditional concept of God makes God a static, self-centred, only self-knowing absolute, not a living, personal being.

Some Theological Responses

There are several responses which theologians can make to this

situation, each of which has had its advocates.

First, the theologian can choose to let 'reason', as he understands its demands, control his understanding of God. He can, for instance, follow Aristotle's view of what reason requires and find the controlling norms of his concept of God in notions of 'the Unmoved Mover' and '*actus purus*'. He will, in consequence, treat talk about God as loving, caring, feeling sympathy, intervening, and so on, as pious but misleading anthropomorphisms. The 'God' of his theology shares the absolute, necessary and unchanging qualities of an ideal value or the multiplication table. Here 'theology' has abandoned religious faith and become a kind of metaphysic.

A contrary response is that of the theologian who attempts to evade the control of reason in order to allow religious faith wholly to determine his talk about God. One type of this response is found in the theology of H. L. Mansel who argues that 'the fundamental concepts of Rational Theology' are 'self-destructive' since contradictions result from the attribution to 'one and the same Being' of the three conceptions of 'the Cause, the Absolute, and the Infinite'.⁹ These contradictions do not belong to the nature of God but reveal the limits of our understanding. We must, therefore, recognise that human reason is incompetent to judge theological matters and base our theology wholly upon God's self-revelation to us. This may seem at first an attractive solution to a difficult problem since it places on God the responsibility for correct theological statements. Unfortunately it is a spurious solution. Some control by reason seems inescapable — even if not explicitly recognised — in identifying an authentic revelation and in determining its meaning. Our recognition and explication of a divine revelation, that is, are not and cannot be wholly free from our presuppositions about the nature of God but reflect those pre-judgments even though they may also modify them. A startling illustration of this is Barth's exposition of the Biblical revelation, especially in his early theology. Whereas the Bible seems to me at least to speak of a God who is constantly present with his people and who reveals himself in personal terms, Barth finds the Bible witnessing primarily to what Kierkegaard

described as 'the infinite qualitative distinction between time and eternity'.¹⁰ In spite, then, of Barth's assertion that his theology is completely determined by and expounds only the Biblical revelation, I suspect that what Barth finds in the Bible is determined by his prior acceptance of a Kierkegaardian understanding of the relation between God and man.

A third response to the problem posed by the incompatibility of the traditional theological understanding of God with the believer's faith in God is to refuse to take the offending terms too seriously. This response is found in theologians who use the the offending words but are not prepared to accept all their implications. One example of this response is found in Gore's attempt to assert that God is 'absolute' while rejecting certain unwelcome implications of this description. Gore states that 'the revealed religion undoubtedly postulates a God who is the absolute'.¹¹ He immediately qualifies this assertion, however, by adding: 'not, of course, that the universe is identical with God its Creator' and by interpreting the notion in terms of God as 'the one and only ultimate source' of all that 'exists in the universe'. In this way he shows that for him God, while described as 'the Absolute', has something over-against himself, even though it is also ultimately dependent upon himself. Furthermore, while Gore states in this sentence that God 'contains . . . all that is', he goes on to say in the next sentence that 'this absoluteness of God must . . . be qualified so as to admit of the existence, by the creative will of God . . . of free spirits' who are dependent on God and yet have 'the power of disordering . . . the world as God would have had it be'.¹² What we have here is an attempt to describe God on the one hand as 'the Absolute' and, on the other, as not the totality of reality and as limited in certain respects by partially autonomous reality (even if a reality which he has created) distinct from himself. This is to use the term 'absolute' but to reject part of what it traditionally means in a way that leaves it uncertain whether or not God is properly to be described as 'absolute' and, if so, what the description means.

This procedure is not uncommon in theology. Attempts

are sometimes made to render it acceptable by baptising its off-spring with the name of 'paradox'. For example, when it is stated that God is both unchanging and acting or both impassible and loving, these conjoint claims are said to be 'paradoxical' and not 'self-contradictory'. A different defence of such apparently self-contradictory claims is to hold that each term must only be understood in a way that is compatible with its associated (and apparently self-contradictory) one: for example, the 'impassibility' of God must be understood in a way that is compatible with his 'love'. Unfortunately both these defences frequently fail in practice to make it clear what the theologian is trying to assert in such cases. They leave the strong suspicion that the theologian 'wants to have his cake and eat it' — to assert, for instance, that God is absolute and unchanging (on the grounds that a 'God' who does not have these qualities cannot be believed in as God) while refusing to admit that these descriptions, when taken seriously, have implications which fundamentally conflict with other claims which he wants to make about God — such as that he responds to the needs of his people.

What, then, is the theologian to do? None of the three responses to the fundamental problem for theology which we have discussed is satisfactory. Reason and faith seem to require that we talk of God in some respects as absolute, necessary, unchanging, cause, infinite and eternal and in other respects as relative, contingent, changing, effect, finite and temporal. Can the theologian do this, though, without falling foul of the principle of non-contradiction? Can, that is, the theologian find a way of using both sets of descriptions in a coherent manner or must he give up theology as an inescapably self-contradictory and so meaningless activity? My claim is that Process Theology offers a way of talking about God which overcomes this fundamental problem in a way that meets the demands both of religion and of reason.

One thing further, though, needs to be said before we investigate the concept of God advanced by process theologians, viz., that it is important to avoid being hypnotized by words. Because we talk of the Admiralty Board, we should not think

that we could use a ruler to measure the thickness of that 'board'. Such a view would indicate that we had failed to understand what is meant by 'board' in this context. This is important when we consider concepts like absolute and relative, necessary and contingent, unchanging and changing, as they are applied to God. We must consider what these concepts mean in the context of God-talk and not be so dominated by their use in other contexts that we fail to appreciate that they have more or less different meanings there.

Five Points in Process Theology

Process theology, as its name implies, derives its conceptual structures from process philosophy, the metaphysical thought primarily developed by A. N. Whitehead though with various antecedents stretching back to the pre-Socratics. Among the principle points of process philosophy are five which are particularly relevant to process theology. *Firstly*, what is real is held to be in 'process'. What is unchanging is either dead and past or abstracted from the real. What is real, living and concrete is continually in process of change. This claim may be supported by the insight that what is most real for any person is not the apparently (but illusorily — cf. what the atomic physicists tell us) unchanging existence of objects like tables and chairs but his own existence and that that existence involves an identity through change — as 'I' become aware of 'my' existence, the 'I' of whose existence 'I' am aware is changing, even in the very process of becoming aware of it. *Secondly*, and following from the first point, what is real is necessarily in time. It has a past out of whose decisions and events it has become what it is now and a future in which what it will become will be determined by the past and by decisions and actions made by itself (if possible) and by others from now onwards. *Thirdly*, it is held that no real entity is a totally discrete individual but that each entity is part of a social process in which it both affects and is affected by all other real entities. This is not to say that every other entity affects a specific individual equally — some entities are far more 'important' and effective in their influence

on a particular entity than others — but it does imply that ultimately everything is bound up and interacts with everything else in a complex way which resembles a society rather than the relationships between numbers in a multiplication table. *Fourthly*, it is claimed that the highest form of power is not mechanical force but the attractiveness and persuasiveness of love which draws others to co-operate rather than compels them to obey. This again may be backed by consideration of personal existence where it seems that I am more truly in the 'power' of those whom I freely choose to obey than of those who coerce me against my will and who never, as a result, win my consent to their plans. *Fifthly* and finally, it is held that God, as Whitehead put it, 'is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles' — as the traditional concept of God seems to require — but as 'their chief exemplification'.¹³ It is on this basis that Hartshorne has developed his concept of God. What is this concept?

Essence, Existence and Actuality

First a short digression is necessary.

The distinction between essence, existence and actuality is fundamental to an understanding of Hartshorne's position. Hartshorne summarises the distinction between existence and actuality in this way: "Existence" is merely a relation of exemplification which actuality (any suitable actuality) has to essence'.¹⁴ Let me try to explain this, at first sight obscure, definition by means of an illustration. Take the statement 'A table exists in the next room' (a rather odd way of putting what we would normally express as 'There is a table in the next room' but not a way which, I think, alters the meaning of the statement). This statement is true if and only if there 'exists in the next room' (a phrase whose meaning we shall regard as clear and not concern ourselves with further) something which has the 'essence' of being a table. Now, simply on the basis of our knowledge of English, we can roughly specify this essence: the essence of being a table, let us say, is the essence of being a solid object which has a flat top,

supported by legs, and is large and strong enough for articles to be placed on it. The presence of any object in the next room which meets this specification would, then, allow us to state truthfully that 'A table exists in the next room'. It should be clear, however, that a wide range of actual objects would allow us to make this statement truthfully, for there are many different kinds of tables. Thus while the statement that 'A table exists in the next room' would tell us that there is in the next room something which is a solid, flat-topped object with legs, large and strong enough to hold articles, we could not tell from this affirmation of its existence what precisely was in the room. Only by inspecting the actual table could we discover in which of the various possible ways the essence of being a table was here exemplified. To say, then, that some 'a' exists is to say that some abstract essence (the essence of being 'a') is somewhere and somehow actualised in an appropriate concrete form. The abstract essence of 'a', however, only specifies more or less widely the range within which an existing 'a' must be concretely actualised. It does not specify its concrete actuality. Furthermore, no 'a' can exist wholly and simply as actualising its essence: as existing it must actualise that essence in some determinate way. A table, for example, cannot exist simply as 'flat-topped' — it must have an actual flat top with, therefore, a particular shape, a particular size and a particular degree of flatness.

Hartshorne's Concept of God

We are now in a position to consider Hartshorne's concept of God.

When we consider any object apart from God, we find that both its existence and its actuality are relative, contingent, changing, effect, finite and temporal. To take, for example, the first two of these qualities: whether we consider a man, a table or a manuscript, we find that its existence is neither absolute nor necessary. It cannot prevent itself being affected or being destroyed by others, nor is there any necessity for it ever to exist at all. That it does happen to exist is due to forces

other than itself. Furthermore, there is no necessity for it to have the actual form that it has. In the case of anything other than God, then, there is no need for it to exist, let alone to have this or that actual form. In the case of God, uniquely, this is not so. God's existence, in order to be appropriate to God, must be regarded as absolute, necessary, unchanging, cause, infinite and eternal. A being whose existence did not have these properties could not be regarded as 'that than which a greater cannot be conceived'. What this means, for example, is that God, as God, must be thought of as existing always and everywhere and forever, as one who can never be destroyed, as one who can never be prevented from existing as what he is, as one who cannot be made to exist as anything other than what he is except by his own volition. (Hartshorne describes this unique mode of existence as *omnitolerant*: it is an existence which, as absolute and necessary, is compatible with, and cannot be destroyed by, all possible relative and contingent objects and events.)

So far Hartshorne's concept of God may seem to agree with that of classical theism. His great insight is to see that this understanding of God's existence does not imply that God's actuality must have the same formal properties. All that the necessary character of God's existence implies for God's actuality is that that actuality must exemplify God's mode of existence in some appropriate form. Thus God's actuality may be understood as relative, contingent, changing, effect, finite and temporal if and so far as this understanding of his actuality is consistent with the nature of his existence as we have described it and is an appropriate exemplification of that mode of existence. If this can be done, then we have a way of talking about God which both recognizes his essential 'Godness' and allows us to use personal descriptions of him meaningfully. Hartshorne claims that, so long as we observe the distinction between abstract existence and concrete actuality, this can be done.

Consider, for example, God's knowledge. We can say that in terms of God's abstract existence his knowledge is absolute: in principle, that is, his knowledge is totally unrestricted, he knows all that there is to be known without any possibility of error.

In terms of his concrete actuality, however, his knowledge is relative to what there is to be known: even God cannot know more than what is knowable. While, then, God knows all that has happened and all that is happening everywhere in the universe, he does not and cannot know the name of Henry VIII's ninth wife nor, since I do not now possess one, the weight of my cricket bat. While, therefore, as *God's*, his knowledge must in principle be complete, unlimited and inerrant, in practice the concrete content of God's knowledge must be relative to and limited by what there is to be known.

Or consider God's reality in relation to the world. That God *is* has always been true and always will be true. God, as God, must be conceived as one who did not come into being through the agency of something prior to himself and as one who cannot be prevented from being by anything other than himself (and, *pace* some of the 'death-of-God' theologians, probably as one who cannot destroy himself). At the same time nothing else has ever or will ever come into being except as ultimately dependent upon God. In terms of bare, abstract existence, therefore, God's reality is to be described as necessary and as the ground of all other reality while the reality of all else is to be described as ultimately dependent upon his reality. Since, however, not all possibilities are compossible, the nature of God's reality in relationship to the world at any time depends in part upon God's choices and in part upon the state of the world. For example, whether God relates himself to the world as impersonal mandarin or as concerned father may depend upon which role he chooses to adopt. Furthermore, the consequences for him of his relationship to the world, which ever role he adopts, will be affected by what the world is actually like. In its concrete actuality, then, God's reality is partly and importantly contingent. If, for example, he chooses to relate himself as a concerned father to a world which is marked by suffering, his actual reality will include sympathy for and so sharing in that suffering. If, alternatively, he chooses to be an impersonal mandarin and the world is marked by suffering, his actual reality may be describable as a state of bliss but it will lack the value of sympathy with the state of others. Thus, while God's reality in relation to the world is

necessary in that he is always there as its ground, it is contingent in that how he is real for the world is partly determined by his own choices among non-compossible values and partly by the state of the world.

Again, consider the nature of God's love. His love may be said to be unchanging in that he never ceases to love men to the utmost. At every moment God seeks what is best for men, both corporately and individually. Granted, however, that we are creatures who change and who live in a changing world, what is best for us at one time may not be the best for us at another time. To take a trivial example which I have already used: love for my two-year-old son involves me in different actions towards him according to whether he is throwing a tantrum, trying out a new toy or walking near the edge of a cliff. The fact that at one time I ignore what he is doing, at another I am prepared to assist him if he asks and at another take a firm hold on him does not, I hope, mean that my love for him varies in its quality at these different times. What it does mean is that my love for him is appropriately expressed in different responses at different times according to what is best for him at each time. In a similar way but on a universal scale, consideration of what it means for God to love suggests that while in abstract principle God's love for men is unchanging in that it is never anything other than perfect concern for the best for men, in concrete practice, in order to be perfect love, it must be expressed in different ways appropriate to the different situations that arise. Thus in order to be perfect love God's love must be said to be both unchanging in principle and changing in its actual modes of expression.

As a final illustration of Hartshorne's understanding of the attributes of God, consider the activity of God. God's activity can be said in abstract terms to be eternal in the sense that God never ceases to express his love and to seek the fulfilment of his purposes in creation. At no time is God not affecting the process of events. What God in practice actually does, however, simply because it does affect the process of events, is itself temporally ordered. While God uses the past and plans for the

future, it does not seem possible to conceive of even God affecting either what is not yet there to be affected (i.e., those events themselves which are still future events) or what has been eternally fixed by having already happened (i.e., those events themselves which are now past as distinct from present evaluations of and responses to those past events). Thus while in terms of God's abstract existence, his activity is to be described as eternal in that there was no point in a temporal order when it began nor will there be any point in such an order when it ends, in terms of God's concrete actuality his activity is to be described as temporal in that his actions which affect the temporal process of concrete reality must themselves be limited by what at any point in time is there to be affected.

Hartshorne calls this concept of God *dipolar* because it uses both of various pairs of opposites (i.e., directly contrary terms) to create the formal structure of its concept of God. He claims that the resulting description neither is self-contradictory nor reflects an arbitrary affirmation of different notions according to our theological wishes in different contexts, since it is systematically related to a distinction between the 'existence' and the 'actuality' of God.

We should note, however, that the resulting dipolar understanding of God's nature does not mean that the opposite of any term which is properly predicated of God is also to be predicated of him. Such an implication would, if valid, make mockery of any meaningful talk about God for it would mean, for instance, that a God who was described as loving, knowing and good would also have to be described as hating, ignorant and evil. The dipolarity of Hartshorne's understanding of God, though, does not apply to all the attributes of God nor is it applied to some of the divine attributes and not to others in a methodologically arbitrary way. It is important here to distinguish between what may be called the *formal* or metaphysical concepts of reality — such as absolute and relative, necessary and contingent, unchanging and changing — and the *material* attributes of reality — such as personal, conscious, active, knowing, loving and good (and their opposites). Hartshorne's dipolar under-

standing of God uses the metaphysical concepts of reality to create a formal structure in terms of which God's material attributes are to be understood. Thus dipolarity, as Hartshorne uses it, does not mean that a loving, knowing and good God is also to be described as hating, ignorant and evil but that God's love, knowledge and goodness are to be understood in a dipolar manner.

This dipolar structure for understanding God allows us, I suggest, both to affirm what must be affirmed about the uniqueness of God's mode of existence if we are to speak of God at all and not of some lesser form of reality and, at the same time, to speak meaningfully of him as active, related and personal. It provides us, then, with a coherent, adequate and appropriate way of conceiving God which overcomes fundamental difficulties in the classical concept of God.

Comparing Traditional and Process Concepts

Since, though this way of understanding God is to be judged by its adequacy and appropriateness as a concept of God as well as by its internal coherence, various decisions have to be made about what the notion of God requires in choosing between the traditional and the process concepts of God. For instance, must God's 'eternity' be understood as a state of absolute simultaneity 'outside time' (if that can mean anything) as the traditional theological view holds, or can it be adequately described as a temporally ordered 'everlastingness' which has neither beginning nor end and so which is in no way threatened by the passage of time? Process theology regards the latter view, which admittedly is not without its own problems, as fully adequate for what we need to say about God as eternal. It judges that the traditional view pays a metaphysical compliment to God which, on analysis, turns out to be meaningless when applied to a being who can be significantly described as living, choosing and doing.

Again, must God's 'omniscience' be understood to include, as traditionally it is held to include, foreknowledge of all future

events or is it adequate to the notion of God as the perfect being to regard his omniscience as referring to his knowledge of all that has occurred up to now and his knowledge of the probabilities of what is likely to happen in the future? Process theology argues that since time is part of the structure of reality, the future, *qua* future, is necessarily not yet here to be known even by God. Consequently since it can be no diminution of God's perfection for him not to know what is not there to be known, the denial of divine foreknowledge in the process concept of God does not mean that that concept is inadequate.

Again, must God's 'perfection' be understood to imply that he is unchanging, as theology has traditionally held — presumably on the grounds that any change in a perfect being must be to relatively imperfect states, or is God's perfection adequately protected when he is conceived as a being whose later states can surpass his former states but who can never at any time be surpassed by others? Hartshorne has devoted considerable energy to developing this latter view of God's perfection as 'dual transcendence'. The traditional understanding of God's perfection as implying that he must be unchanging is criticised on the grounds, *inter alia*, that to be absolutely unchanging is a state which seems on reflection to be inferior to our own imperfect state as beings with a limited ability to be aware of and to respond to events. To regard God as unchanging is to regard his perfection in terms of that of a ball-bearing — for a perfect ball-bearing would never lose its pure sphericity whatever pressures were applied to it — rather than in terms appropriate to living, personal existence. God's perfection is consequently expressed as a state of continual maximum self-surpassingness where, in terms of God's knowledge for example, at any moment God knows all that is and has been up to then actual but at any later moment knows also what has come to be actual since that earlier moment. This does not mean that God's earlier states are relatively imperfect but that at each moment he is totally aware of and responsive to all that there is at that moment to be aware of and responsive to, including all that has happened up till then. In this way it is possible, according to Hartshorne's process theology, to speak appropriately and

significantly of God's perfection in terms of change in God.

Panentheism

Hartshorne not only describes his understanding of God as *dipolar*, but also as *panentheistic*. What does *panentheism* mean? He uses this term to distinguish his position both from the *theism* of traditional theology and from the *pantheism* of those who identify all reality with God, and to indicate his own view of the relation between God and the world.

There are three, and only three, ways in which God can be thought of as affecting and as being affected by the world. He can be thought of as affecting and as being affected by no, some or all events in the world. To affect and to be affected by some but not all events is an imperfect state and therefore not appropriate to God. To be affected by no events in the world is to be like Aristotle's Unmoved Mover. It is a state appropriate to a perfect ball-bearing or an ideal but, as I have already suggested, is not appropriate to the perfection of a being who is significantly described in terms such as personal, loving and knowing. A being who affects no events in the world is absolutely irrelevant to the world and, so far as the world is concerned, non-existent. Such a being could not be described as the God of religious belief. If, then, God is not to be identified with all reality, the only appropriate way to describe him is as a being who both is affected by and affects all events in the world. This, basically, is the panentheist view of the relation between God and the world. It sees God and the world neither as two asymmetrically related entities where only one (the world) can be affected by the other (God) — the defective view of traditional theism — nor as self-identical — the defective view of pantheism — but as two reciprocally interdependent entities which affect each other. This does not deny the world's dependence upon God for its existence but it does allow to the world a certain (God-given) autonomy which empowers it to act, within limits, independently of God, either co-operating with or opposing his purposes. Hartshorne illustrates this relation of God to the world

by the relation of an ideal teacher to his pupils or of an ideal ruler to his subjects. The ideal teacher, for example, would always be totally aware of his pupils' needs and continually be responding to them as he attempted to bring each of them to the highest realisation of their potentialities that was compatible with a similar realisation by all the rest.

Process theology thus describes God both as maximally influenced by all events — for nothing at all can happen without him being totally aware of it — and as maximally influencing all events. God's influence over events, however, is held to be controlled by his purposes, particularly by those that are expressed by his creation of free creatures and by his love for that creation. God is not regarded as exerting his influence as a coercive power which destroys the freedom of others but rather as exercising his power in love. He is presented, accordingly, as one who seeks to lure others in their freedom to co-operate with his purposes so that each individual may attain the maximum creative satisfaction that is compatible with the same fulfilment of all other individuals. This view of God also means that God is seen as one who shares in the suffering of those who suffer and in the joy of those who rejoice. He is no distant, cut-off, impassible and impassive deity but a God whose love for his creatures makes their feelings part of his own. The creature thus contributes to the life of his Creator. Before the preface to *Man's Vision of God* Hartshorne quotes approvingly from Blake's *Songs of Innocence* :

‘O! he gives to us his joy,
That our grief he may destroy,
Till our grief is fled and gone
He doth sit by us and moan.’

In the end the dipolar panentheist conception of God can be seen as a serious attempt to provide a coherent structure for understanding God which makes it possible for theologians to affirm that ‘God is love’ without denying *either* the ‘Godness’ of God *or* the full reality of his love.

The structure is not without its critics. Professor H. P. Owen,

for instance, describes it as 'a self-contradictory piece of anthropomorphism' which is presented in a 'logically sophisticated form'.¹⁵ My own judgment, for what it is worth, is that Professor Owen has failed to appreciate both the basic logic of Hartshorne's dipolarity and the inherent unsatisfactoriness of the traditional concept of God.¹⁶ In particular it seems that he has not completely understood the crucial distinction between existence and actuality. Consequently his criticisms of Hartshorne's dipolar pantheism are based upon an inadequate appreciation of that concept.

In this paper, I have had time only to answer briefly the questions of the 'Why' and the 'What' of process theology, not to engage in detailed examinations of criticisms of it. Having thus warned you that process theology is thoroughly rejected by some, I want to close by suggesting that it has arisen out of a proper dissatisfaction with traditional ways of talking about God and that it offers a basic conceptuality for such talk which is at least worthy of serious consideration. Process theology, though, like process philosophy, presents a way of thinking about things which in some respects is radically different from our traditional ways. It is important, therefore, to consider it in terms of its own conceptual structures. Confusion and misunderstanding will arise if we try to evaluate it in terms of a different conceptuality — such as that which underlies traditional theology. Finally, it should be noted that much process thought is bound up with panpsychic positions. Although I have not had time to discuss this point in this paper, I am not convinced that the two are necessarily linked and therefore I do not consider, in spite of what I have just said, that the unacceptability of panpsychism necessarily shows the unacceptability of the concept of God advanced by process theologians.

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14. C. Hartshorne, *Anselm's Discovery*, 1965, p. 136.
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16. Cf. H. P. Owen's, *Concepts of Deity*, 1971.

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EDITORIAL NOTE. *It is our usual practice to use capitals for pronouns referring to God but to do so in this paper seems undesirable since they occur so frequently; often several times on a line.*