

therefore not knowable as actual, even by a perfect knower. The perfect knower knows the future as potential, which is all that it is. God knows those potentialities perfectly, of course. But perfect knowledge of a potentiality is not equivalent to knowledge of an actuality. Twentieth-century revolutions in physics and cosmology reveal that the condensation of actuality from potentiality is not a simple transformative process. Rather it is a process deeply and thoroughly shot through with uncertainty. This process abounds with the real (sometimes minuscule, sometimes significant, but always real) possibility for something unexpected to occur—something not merely unexpected to common sense or to crude probabilistic judgments, but truly unable to be confidently expected even by the perfect Expecter.

Uncertainty and Faith

This climate of uncertainty is the best and most honest understanding we have reached of reality at the dawn of the twenty-first century. What, therefore, can we make of those who cling to belief in a fixed future, an end of time that we are rapidly approaching like a train approaching a station? I can only conclude that for such believers, the benefits of security outweigh the benefits of assuming faith's risk. For these believers, to assure themselves that they will be vindicated in the end is of paramount importance. They are unwilling to take on the risk of faith without a guaranteed reward.

Of course, this approach to faith negates faith's very nature. It is not a risk if a payoff is assured. Faith is not enough for this kind of believer; they must supplement their faith, or rather replace it, by adopting a doctrine of an actual, already-existing future in which their choice is vindicated by their side's eventual victory.

In this age of pluralism, we have at last begun to realize that Christian triumphalism is antithetical to Christian faith. The God who is for us and who asks us to be for God is truly Emmanuel, God *with* us in the stream of time. This God-with-us is supporting us in our free choices for the good, the true, and the beautiful. This God is redeeming the sins that set those causes back by working through them creatively to advance God's will. Yet many still worship a god whose most crucial attribute isn't goodness or grace or love or beauty, but power. This god becomes worthy of devotion primarily for winning in the end. Only the God who, as process theology describes, shares the risk of faith in a set of values and a vision of the future intrinsically worth enacting, is truly worthy of worship. This God demonstrates solidarity with creatures by graciously fostering the development of significant free will and decision-making power that they exercise alone, without coercion. In this God-for-us, we can place legitimate, human, valuable, and fruitful faith.

CHAPTER 2

Jesus and Christ in Process Perspective

■ JOHN B. COBB JR.

Jesus

Who was Jesus? Since this man has played a greater role in shaping the history of the West, and possibly the world, than anyone else, the question is of general importance and interest. For those of us who are personally committed to follow him, the question has heightened urgency.

For two centuries now, the question of Jesus' identity has prompted critical historical research. The historical reconstructions of Jesus and his times have varied widely. A few scholars have concluded that a religious community made up the stories about Jesus with no historical basis at all. On the whole, however, the consensus is that "Jesus" names a real person and that some of the New Testament accounts are reasonably accurate indications of what he did. Few doubt that he lived in Galilee, was baptized by John, gathered disciples around him, and was crucified by the Roman government. But just which of the other stories about him have a factual basis remains a subject of dispute.

Even more important are uncertainties about his message. A generation ago, cutting edge scholars depicted Jesus as an apocalyptic. That is, they thought that the reported sayings about the imminent coming of God's reign were authentic. They interpreted Jesus' message in light of this expectation. Of course, the scholars did not believe that his predictions were accurate. But many thought that the understanding of human existence associated with the erroneous, mythological belief was relevant for us as well. The greatest New Testament scholar of the twentieth century, Rudolph Bultmann, called for "demythologizing" Jesus' message, by which he meant interpreting it existentially. Bultmann taught that, moment by moment, we are called to take responsibility for our lives with a decision that expresses love rather than to allow ourselves simply to reflect the culture of our time.

Today many cutting edge scholars are convinced that a later generation of believers added the apocalyptic sayings attributed to Jesus. Jesus himself, they think, was a wisdom teacher who challenged the dominant structures and authorities of his time in the name of compassion for the poor and devotion to God. One expression of this scholarship is the Jesus Seminar and its determination of the degree of likelihood that the putative sayings of Jesus were really his.

Fortunately, not everything changes according to these important judgments! We can say with some confidence that Jesus emphasized God's love for us and the importance of our loving our neighbors. Jesus challenged the religious and political authorities of his day in terms of his vision of God's purposes for the world. That vision turned upside down values that were common to that society and ours. Central to his teaching was the coming of God's *basileia* (God's reign or commonwealth). Jesus called people to live toward that world in which God's purposes will be fulfilled on earth as they are already fulfilled in heaven. Much in this message continues to inspire and direct us.

Regardless of the outcome of continuing debates, the resulting picture of the historical Jesus will be very different from traditional christology. For many centuries Jesus was not viewed as a humanly understandable Galilean teacher but as a divine being, different in kind from all other human beings. The great drama was that of descent from heaven and return to heaven. The primary work was either the defeat of Satan or the appeasement of the just wrath of God the Father. In short, the church's teachings about Jesus focused on incarnation, crucifixion, atonement, resurrection, ascension, and anticipated return.

Some theologians have replaced the Christ of the creeds with the Jesus of the historians. Others have refused to do so. They draw a contrast between the Jesus of the historians and the Christ of faith. The Christ of faith is Jesus as the believing church has understood and experienced him. The Christ of the creeds was developed to account for the faith of the church, not to explain the historians' reconstruction of Jesus.

These alternatives have been posed sharply in the twentieth century. The work of historians has become increasingly influential in shaping the understanding of Jesus in more liberal churches, as well as in the wider culture. But the most important theological movement of the twentieth century, associated with Karl Barth, denied the relevance of the work of historians to Christian faith.

This has not been a matter of naïve opposition to critical scholarship. For Barth, scholarship has its place, and the church has no business opposing it or trying to restrict its freedom. Nor does Barth's rejection of the historians' Jesus for theological purposes express indifference to the "real" Jesus. Instead, Barth's rejection was based on a fundamental fact about what modernity considers good scholarship. Such scholarship is nontheistic. For Barth, reconstructions of Jesus that leave God out of the picture do not tell us who Jesus was.

Barth appeals instead to the witness of believers as found in the Bible. For us to be believers is to share in their faith and vision. We do not become believers by examining the evidence provided by historians. Faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit.¹

Process theology responds to this situation by opposing the dualism of the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, while agreeing with Barth that the worldview presupposed by modern historians is unacceptable for faith. This worldview is inadequate for anyone who has an appreciation of the New Testament text. For example, the New Testament account of Jesus is full of miracle stories. Most historians simply assume that these are untrue. They do not, therefore, examine the evidence in favor of their authenticity. In other words, those who know in advance that miracles do not occur have no need to sift evidence as they would with stories that do not describe miracles.

The situation today is a bit less rigid than it has been in the past. We know so much about the role of mental states in healing that the flat dismissal of "faith-healing" is no longer universal. But the healing miracles are still treated peripherally and skeptically for the most part, despite their central role in the gospel accounts. The *a priori* dismissal of other miracle stories continues. In the background is the Enlightenment assumption of fixed laws of nature that admit of no exceptions, along with the understanding of miracles as violations of such laws. In contrast, process thought argues that most of these laws are statistical generalizations about the habits of nature when primarily physical events are not influenced by primarily mental ones. How mental states affect the behavior of physical objects (beginning with human bodies) requires separate investigation. Stories of extraordinary influence deserve respectful consideration.

Process theologians can celebrate the softening of the exclusion of the effects of faith on human health. We hope for more movement in this direction. Just as historians seek to decide other matters of history with real openness to evidence, we hope for the day when miracle stories will be treated on the same basis. If, as process thinkers believe, the mental and the physical are intimately interconnected, we cannot place an *a priori* limit on what people of extraordinary spiritual power may do. We need to examine the evidence in particular cases. When historians bring their skills and their methods to bear, without negative presuppositions, we will be in a much better position to reconstruct the ministry of Jesus.

The critical "miracle" for theological reflection is the resurrection of Jesus. Historians generally assume that what the New Testament reports about this cannot have taken place. They do not deny that Paul had a vision, and they allow that others may have had similar visions earlier. But the implication of their presuppositions is that these visions were hallucinatory. They assume that the crucified Jesus cannot have actually appeared to his followers.

One major theologian, Wolfhart Pannenberg, has challenged the historians with historical arguments.² Of course, he must oppose their tendency to reject events that are too unusual. He calls for openness to uniqueness. If the prejudices

of historians are set aside, he believes, they will find strong historical evidence for the resurrection appearances of Jesus as objective events rather than hallucinations. As a process theologian I am inclined to agree.

Although process thought is open to dramatic novelty, process theologians find factual claims more plausible if the events that are asserted to have happened have analogies that can be studied. Pannenberg notes the frequent reports of appearances to loved ones by those who have recently died. Students of these appearances find considerable evidence that at least some of them are not mere hallucinations. Sometimes the recipient has no prior knowledge of the death. Sometimes information is imparted that is hard to explain in any other way. That Jesus also appeared to some of his followers does not seem incredible in this context.

Pannenberg also makes a case for the empty tomb. As a process theologian I do not absolutely exclude the possibility that a physical body can be transformed into a spiritual one, but I am skeptical that this occurred. The evidence seems too weak. In other cases of appearances of the dead, their bodies were not affected.

I have pursued this discussion primarily to indicate how I believe process thought can and should affect historical reconstruction. I do not mean to say that all process thinkers would come to the same conclusions. Although process thought is open to paranormal (or miraculous) phenomena in a way that Enlightenment metaphysics was not, nothing requires process thinkers to take an interest in such matters.

This openness to a variety of judgments is based on a second characteristic of process theology, which further differentiates it from Pannenberg. For Pannenberg, the affirmation of the factual resurrection of Jesus is *the* cornerstone of theology.³ For process theology, the issue is important but not decisive. The resurrection of Jesus does not prove that his teachings are correct or that everyone should become a Christian. A Jew can believe that Jesus appeared to his disciples without becoming a Christian. A Christian can believe that the resurrection signifies only changes in the attitudes and beliefs of the disciples without ceasing to be a Christian.

Nevertheless, that Jesus truly appeared to his disciples after death is not an unimportant belief. It supports the conviction that life does not end with the grave. It affords deep joy that his religious and political enemies did not defeat this remarkable man. It helps us understand the passion and conviction with which discouraged disciples gave themselves to the spread of the faith.

For process theology, no one belief is absolutely necessary for Christians to hold. Christianity is a process, a sociohistorical movement. Such a movement certainly requires beliefs about its origins, about its nature and mission, and about the world. These beliefs change and develop from generation to generation. The task of theologians is to help shape them in faithfulness to the movement's history and its new situation, so that they will be as honest and truthful as possible, and as helpful in guiding responses to changing challenges.

Our current task is to come to terms with the evidence that lies before us about who and what Jesus was. So far, I have suggested that, when approached from a process perspective, this evidence encourages reaffirmation as historical probability of parts of the New Testament picture of Jesus that recent historians have rejected. But I have said nothing about Jesus as the incarnation of God. Process thought allows us to move to that topic as well without sharp discontinuity with an enriched historical thinking.

The Word Became Flesh

For process theology, God's being present or immanent in Jesus is a matter of historical fact. We believe that God is immanent in every event whatsoever. The exclusion of talk of God from factual discourse is, from our point of view, an error. This means that talk of how Jesus was related to God can and should be discussed in continuity with what we learn about Jesus through historical research. The "Christ of faith" is continuous with the "Jesus of history." To reflect intelligently on these matters, we need to consider, first, how God is in all things and especially in all people, and, second, how God was present in Jesus.

God in All Things

According to Whitehead, each unitary event or actual occasion comes into being out of all the occasions that lie in its past. "The many become one and are increased by one" (PR 21). The new occasion is different from all the others precisely because its past is not identical with that of any other event. In the moment of coming to be, it has its own unique subjectivity.

However, this is only a partial account. In itself it explains how the past shapes the present. If this were the whole story, then the present would be nothing but the predetermined outcome of the past. Whitehead and his followers share with many others the conviction that we are not automatons. That means that just how we constitute ourselves, moment by moment, is not strictly determined by the past. In part we decide what we become.

The question is how we can have real alternatives among which to decide. Whitehead shows that we can have such alternatives only if, in addition to taking account of, or "prehending" past actual occasions, we also "prehend" possibilities not derived from the past. Whitehead calls these "pure possibilities" or "eternal objects." We face an infinite number of such possibilities, but we prehend those that are relevant to the particular past out of which we arise each moment. Each actual occasion of human experience constitutes itself through the integration of such possibilities with the actuality of the past.

We do not experience the alternatives among which we choose neutrally. Some appear to us better than others. "Better" does not mean only more pleasant and enjoyable, although these are important positive considerations. A better possibility is one that enriches our experience in the immediate present more and also contributes more to the relevant future, our own and that of others.

This possibility often invites us to take a risk or to break with long-established habits. There is no certainty, in any moment, that we will choose the best.

If the totality of things were exhausted by the facticity of the world, that is, by all that has happened in the past, no prehensions of pure possibility would call us to creative self-actualization. Indeed, we would face no decision at all, since everything would be pre-decided. How, then, can we explain the real effectiveness of previously unrealized possibilities in our experience? Whitehead believes pure possibilities cannot influence us if they are only abstractions. They must inhere in actuality. That actuality he calls God. God's inclusion and ordering of the whole realm of pure possibility is God's "Primordial Nature." God's Primordial Nature participates in the coming to be of every creaturely event.

The Primordial Nature of God plays a necessary, although rather limited, role in the constitution of elementary occasions. These are predominantly physical. That means that they overwhelmingly conform to their past. Life brings a breakthrough. We distinguish the living from the inanimate by the role that novelty plays. Then, some living things develop the capacity for the more complex integrations of novelty into their physical existence. These integrations introduce thought and intelligence. In these primarily mental occasions, the role of God's presence greatly expands.

Process theologians have noted a remarkable affinity between a plausible account of how the Primordial Nature of God functions in the world and what is said in the prologue to the gospel of John about the "Logos" or "Word" of God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being through him was life, and the life was the light of all people" (Jn. 1:1-4).

Given this similarity, process theologians often identify the Primordial Nature of God with what John calls the Word. This leads to similarities between process theology and the Logos theologies of the early church. They are alike in seeing that the Divine that was present in Jesus is also present in all of us and in the whole of creation.

God Present in Jesus

But a christology must deal not only with how Jesus was like all other human beings, but also with what is distinctive about him. Why do we single him out for special attention and reverence? Was there anything different or unusual about the way God was present in him?

John describes the difference as follows: "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world" (1:9); and "the Word became flesh and lived among us" (1:14a). The latter formulation has been immensely important in the formulation of Christian teaching, since becoming flesh means being "incarnated." What becomes flesh is that which already enlightens everyone. It is hardly a total break. Yet it is clear that for John the difference is important, and it has been important for the church since then.

The questions for process theologians are two. First, is there historical evidence that Jesus' relation to God was unusual? Second, if so, how can we best understand that in process terms?

Historical Evidence for Jesus' Unusual Relation to God

Much historical evidence shows that Jesus had remarkable powers. This is especially so when we read the New Testament as process thinkers. We need not suppose that all the miracles occurred just as they are reported. We know that followers embellish and invent. But the likelihood remains that Jesus performed startling healings and other miracles. He attributed these to the power of God working through him. Few of us claim comparable power.

Further, he spoke with extraordinary authority. He seems to have associated himself with God in astoundingly intimate terms, addressing God as "Abba," or "Daddy," and identifying the authority of what he said with God's. He did not base his authority on his scholarly expertise in the interpretation of scripture, but even set it over against traditional teaching. What he taught comes to us, even today, with something of that authority. We are unlikely to follow his teaching straightforwardly, but we cannot dismiss it.

Understanding Jesus' Relation to God in Process Terms

Can process theology throw light on these remarkable characteristics of Jesus? If God is in all of us, what could differentiate God's presence in Jesus from that in others? The easiest answer is based on differences in the extent to which we embody the Primordial Nature of God moment by moment. If in one moment we resist the possibilities that come to us, the possibilities in the next moment will be more limited. We can harden our hearts toward God. That will never end God's role in our lives, but it will greatly reduce our freedom, making us more and more determined by our past and by our context. If, on the other hand, moment by moment we respond to the fullest possibility God offers, new possibilities open to us. We become more and more free. Our positive response to God's call becomes increasingly spontaneous.

Most of us fall somewhere between these extremes. The differences among us are a matter of degree. But differences of degree can be very dramatic. We speak of conversions and becoming a new person. If Jesus from his youth was unusually responsive to God's call, we can have some clue as to how in his maturity he had a spiritual power and authority that was very distinctive indeed.

We also are called to play different roles. Our calling depends on the circumstances in which we live and our genetic constitution. It depends also on the needs of our society and world. People equally responsive to God may lead very different lives. One may be a mother bringing up her children and managing her family. Another may be a social reformer seeking to overthrow unjust institutions. A third may be a scholar, patiently advancing historical knowledge. Jesus' calling differed from all of these, and it turned out to be of enormous importance for the future of the world. About most people, however faithful, we know nothing. So we never raise the question of their distinctive

relation to God. In Jesus' case, because beliefs about him still shape our world, it is natural and appropriate to ask the question.

Most process theologians will agree that Jesus was called to a unique mission and that he responded with extraordinary faithfulness. Our question now is whether the uniqueness of Jesus goes still further. Was Jesus so related to God, at least part of the time, that God's incarnation in him is distinct from God's mode of presence in us? Most of the tradition has thought so. Faith does not depend on a positive answer, but if the evidence encourages us to move closer to the tradition, we should do so.

I personally have engaged in speculations about the multiple ways in which an occasion of human experience can be structured. Since the prehension of God is a factor in all human experience, this variety of structures involves a variety of roles for God. I propose that in Jesus, part of the time, the self or "I" was co-constituted by the prehension of Jesus' personal past and the prehension of God. If so, this would provide a process equivalent to what is said of Jesus in the Chalcedonian creed. That speaks of one person coming into being through the union of the Divine and the human. The creed was composed by persons who thought in terms of a divine substance and a human substance, and of a person as a substance. Given those metaphysics, they had a difficult task indeed to maintain both the deity and the humanity of Jesus as a person. For process thought, the one person of Jesus can be understood as co-constituted by the presence within him, moment by moment, of both God and his personal past. If God was in Jesus in this unusual way, it is easier to understand his extraordinary spiritual authority. It might also justify our speaking of a unique incarnation of God in Jesus.

It may help to contrast this structure with the one more familiar to us. For most of us most of the time, the "I" is constituted by prehensions of the personal past. We prehend God also, but we experience God as one who is other to ourselves. At best, we experience God as gracious to us. Sometimes, instead, we experience God as calling us to something we don't want to do. When we refuse, we sometimes experience God as judging us. We do not experience God's presence as co-constituting our selfhood.

Such speculations illustrate the ability of process theology to contribute to ideas about the form that incarnation took in Jesus. They are certainly not binding on process theologians or anyone else. Some prefer to stay closer to the findings of contemporary scholars. Some prefer to be guided by the kerygma, the earliest proclamation of the church. Adoption of the process conceptuality does not necessitate any particular speculation about him.

Christ

We have spoken of Jesus and of the Word that was incarnate in him. But what do we mean by "Christ"? We can use "Christ" as one of the titles of Jesus—"the anointed one." This is its literal meaning. The first Christians claimed that Jesus was the long-awaited messiah and would return soon to fulfill the

messianic role. But for the Greeks, the specific relation to Israel bound up with messianic expectations was of less interest than the conviction that in Jesus God had come to the world to effect salvation for all. Incarnation came to be more central to what was understood by "Christ." This remains true in the church to our day. To call Jesus "Christ" usually implies that God was in Jesus working for our salvation.

In the language of the church, "Christ" often refers to the divine reality as incarnate. This frees the word from too close an identity with a single historical figure, although its use is always bound to the knowledge of God we gain from Jesus. We can speak of Christ as present throughout the cosmos and especially in the poor and oppressed. We see Christ in our needy neighbor. Luther said that we should be Christs to one another. The church is the body of Christ.

Process theology offers its distinctive account of what characterizes those persons or groups in which we see Christ. They are especially clear instances of "creative transformation." This requires explanation.

As noted above, God's presence in each occasion of human experience provides possibilities for being something other than the sheer, predetermined outcome of the past. This does not reduce the role of the past in the present. Indeed, the incorporation of novel possibilities often enables the present to include more of the past. An occasion can transform elements that would otherwise be mutually exclusive into what Whitehead called "contrasts."

This can be understood more easily with examples that take more than a single occasion of experience to transpire. Consider the case in which one who believes that Jesus is the only savior encounters those who look to Gautama Buddha for their spiritual guidance and inspiration. The exclusivist belief about Jesus seems to be incompatible with the spiritual preeminence of Gautama. It seems that one must reject one affirmation to embrace the other. Many have done so.

But novel ideas and fresh thinking can come into play and lead to a much more creative response. One may consider much more carefully in what way Jesus saves us. One may see that this is quite different from the enlightenment attained by Gautama and sought by his followers. In the contrast, the distinctive work of both becomes clearer. The believer in Jesus as savior may recognize the reality and great value of the enlightenment Gautama realized. This recognition need not weaken faith in Jesus. It can transform such faith. Faith in Jesus is now seen as opening us to appreciate and even to appropriate the great spiritual attainments of other religious leaders and communities. These can be understood as needed for the coming of God's *basileia*, which Christians believe to be the fullness of salvation. The move in this direction is a creative transformation of individual believers and, through them, of the Christian movement. In such a development, process theologians see Christ—that is, God—at work in the world.

Obviously, most instances of creative transformation, occurring moment by moment, are not so dramatic and history shaping. They are, however, always

instances of enlargement, in which one retains the richness of one's personal history but incorporates also the new opportunities of the moment. In the process, the meaning of what one inherits from childhood to adulthood, if it is healthy, contains numerous instances of creative transformation. The way mature Christians think of God is different from the way they thought of God as children, but, ideally, it is not discontinuous. It has been transformed by taking account of many things that were outside of the child's experience.

Paul wrote: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds" (Rom. 12:2a). The idea of creative transformation can be understood as an elaboration of that text. It is also closely related to a term much more common in the New Testament: *metanoia*. This is usually translated "repentance" and too often understood simply as regret. But the central meaning is "change of mind." When *metanoia* occurs, we see things differently and follow a different course of action. We may not be ashamed of how we have acted in the past, but now that we understand reality differently, we would be ashamed to continue to think and act in that way. We can understand this as creative transformation. Where it occurs, we see Christ.

Wisdom

Recently, process theologians have been influenced by somewhat parallel reflections about the earliest christologies and about the implications of Whitehead. Feminists have shown that in the New Testament the Divine that is present in Jesus is spoken of more often as "Wisdom" or "*Sophia*" than as "Word" or "Logos." Even the prologue to John, quoted above, may have originally spoken of *Sophia*, who is imaged as feminine. One speculation is that the church moved from a Wisdom christology to a Word christology partly to avoid including the feminine in God. Today we are trying to reverse that process and depict God as equally feminine and masculine in character. This leads many to renew a Wisdom christology; and process theologians, who have long critiqued stereotypically masculine images of God, are fully supportive.

This could be done, of course, simply terminologically. We could replace Word with Wisdom in writing about Christ while making no other changes. But further reflection on Whitehead's own writings suggests another, congenial, change. When Whitehead wrote about God, he usually had reference only to the Primordial Nature. But when he entered the sphere of religion, he emphasized the "Consequent Nature," God's inclusion of the world. Whitehead saw particular religious importance in the conviction that not only is God in us but also we are in God. God takes us up into the divine life as we perish moment by moment. What is ephemeral in the world lives on in God. We find meaning in the belief that all that we do we contribute to the divine life forever.

At the very end of *Process and Reality* Whitehead makes clear that he believes that, as is true of all other things, God's Consequent Nature is felt, or prehended, in the world. He calls this "the particular providence for particular occasions"

(351). In other words, the way God is present in a human occasion is affected by how previous occasions have affected God. Our experience of God can be of the fullness of the divine actuality instead of only the possibilities God orders for us in the Primordial Nature.

The concluding passage of *Process and Reality* raises many questions, and even process theologians may be more comfortable to limit themselves to the major themes of the book. But whereas the Primordial Nature is appropriately thought of as Word or *Logos*, when we consider the Consequent Nature, which includes the world along with the Primordial Nature, Wisdom or *Sophia* suggests itself. It seems appropriate to imagine that God's Wisdom is incarnate in Jesus.

This needs unpacking. In Greek thought, the *Logos* was the principle of reason embodied both in the human mind and in the order of the cosmos. The Primordial Nature of God, in Whitehead, plays that role. In the prologue to John's gospel, the concept is enriched by its association with life, which suggests that it is the source of vitality and novelty as well as order. The Primordial Nature of God plays that role also. It is quite natural to consider that, in a general way, what Whitehead names as the Primordial Nature of God is what the prologue to John calls the *Logos*.

But this identification leaves out much that is important about God. God not only orders the world and gives it novelty; God also saves the world in God's own life. God integrates the eternal *Logos* with the ever-expanding world of creatures. By incorporating that world in the divine life, God suffers with those who suffer and rejoices with those who rejoice. All of this seems to be revealed by and incarnate in Jesus.

Further, the way God is present in believers involves the integration of this internalization of the world with the more abstract Primordial Nature. The knowledge that results from this integration is more naturally thought of as Wisdom or *Sophia* than as Word or *Logos*. To understand that God is present to and in us as Wisdom enriches and personalizes our relationship to God. To understand that God's Wisdom was incarnate in Jesus enriches our christology.

This also makes better contact with the teaching of Paul, who thought of incarnation in terms of God's Wisdom rather than God's Word. Paul's most extended discussion of Wisdom is in 1 Corinthians 1:17 through 2:13. Here Paul makes clear that Christ is the Wisdom of God. This Wisdom is in marked contrast to what the world in general understands to be wisdom. God's Wisdom appears to most people as foolishness, and God's power appears to them as weakness. But those who believe find God just where the world does not seek the Divine.

Whitehead himself pointed out the difference between what is revealed about God in and through Jesus and the dominant ways in which God had been, and indeed, has continued to be, understood. His analysis is congenial to Paul's reflections. Sadly, the church as a whole preferred largely to ignore this revelation in its official teaching and to hold on to the views of God that

expressed worldly wisdom. One way of understanding process theology is as the effort to bring the church back to that understanding of God that Paul saw as uniquely manifest in Christ as the Wisdom of God. Whitehead wrote:

In the great formative period of theistic philosophy, which ended with the rise of Mahometanism, after a continuance coeval with civilization, three strains of thought emerge which, amid many variations in detail, respectively fashion God in the image of an imperial ruler, God in the image of a personification of moral energy, God in the image of an ultimate philosophical principle...

There is, however, in the Galilean origin of Christianity yet another suggestion which does not fit very well with any of the three main strands of thought. It does not emphasize the ruling Caesar, or the ruthless moralist, or the unmoved mover. It dwells upon the tender elements in the world, which slowly and in quietness operate by love; and it finds purpose in the present immediacy of a kingdom not of this world. Love neither rules, nor is it unmoved; also it is a little oblivious as to morals. (PR 342-343)

In light of Whitehead's comments, we realize that process theology can indeed be seen, not as an exception to, but rather an extension of, the Galilean origins of Christianity. Process theology proposes, not only that Jesus is an incarnation of God in many important ways, but also that God is like Jesus in equally important ways. God is the great companion: a fellow sufferer who understands, absorbing the world's sins and sufferings, and who guides the world, not by violence or blind decree, but rather by love.

CHAPTER 3

Coming to Salvation

A Process Understanding

■ JOHN CULP

Many people today reject traditional Christianity but seek spirituality and salvation in a variety of ways. For some people, salvation involves an intensely personal experience of God's love. For others, salvation means deliverance from a terrorist bombing or a debilitating illness. Some long for meaning in the daily routines of life. Contemporary ideas about salvation range from personal beliefs about life after death to highly developed theological concepts derived from interreligious dialogue. Amid these diverse approaches exist the common themes of a need for change and the actual occurrence of a change. Meaningful expressions of these themes typically involve attention to the need for salvation and the source of salvation. The crop-destroying drought brings cries for deliverance from hot dry days; and yet, when reflected upon, the cry reveals a longing for a more permanent state of satisfaction, sometimes called eternal life. The question then emerges: Is there a reality that can bring this about? For many people, that reality is God. My aim in this essay is to present a process approach to salvation that responds to these dynamics.

Process theologians describe salvation at three different levels. Historically, process thought began with a metaphysical description of reality that showed how salvation was possible, and what it involved, by talking about God and the preservation of value.¹ In a time when it was difficult to understand the structure of reality in a way that allowed for divine action to bring about salvation, process thought offered the possibility of creative change due to God's actions. Later, process thinkers developed explicitly theological statements about salvation based on these ideas.² In more recent times, process theology has sought to explain the experiential aspect of salvation.³ I will begin with the experiential and then consider the theological and metaphysical aspects of salvation.

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

P R E S S

CHALICE



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