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**A Comparison of the Idea of Revelation
In the Thought of
Schubert M. Ogden and Lewis S. Ford**

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A Thesis Project
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Apologetics
Liberty University
Lynchburg, Virginia

March 30, 2002

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish first to thank my Heavenly Father, Jesus, my God-Man Savior, and Holy Spirit who loves, guides, and corrects me in righteousness.

To my advisor, Dr. William David Beck, I give special thanks and appreciation for his wisdom and patience in overseeing my thesis.

I also want to acknowledge and thank Dr. Lewis S. Ford of Old Dominion University for his patience, support, understanding, and insightful work which was of invaluable assistance to me during my research.

Special recognition and gratitude goes to my father, Mr. Eli Jones, Sr.; my mother, Mrs. Elsie Jones; and my sister, Ms. Wilma "Lil' Bit" Jones, for their prayers, financial support, and encouragement during the many months that I worked on this thesis.

I am particularly grateful to my Pastor, Dr. Allen Rodney McFarland, Senior Pastor of Calvary Evangelical Baptist Church in Portsmouth, Virginia, for his constant motivation and words of wisdom. Likewise, I wish to thank my typist, Mrs. Glenda Ransom, and all my other Christian friends for their encouragement and assistance in bringing this thesis to completion.

Finally, I am indebted to Dr. Jerry Falwell and Liberty University for the opportunity to obtain an excellent education and my Masters in Apologetics.

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ABSTRACT

The viewpoint of Schubert M. Ogden and Lewis S. Ford set the boundaries for the way God acts towards His creatures through revelation in both a general and special way. First, a comparison of their viewpoints will be given to prove this claim. Both men followed separate lines of process philosophy (Whitehead and Hartshorne) in order to reach their theological concepts of revelation. The effects of Hartshorne on Ogden led him finally to conceive of God as an Immanent Individual who can act originally in an authentic revelation to man, who can receive and respond to such an act by representing it as a special act. On the other hand, Ford's loyalty to Whitehead's original contention that God is an actual entity leads him to depict God as one who acts generally towards all creatures, and acts specifically through a special contingent authentic revelation in continuity with the contingent response to humanity. Second, the process model as a whole will be examined and challenged to see if the biblical concept of special revelation can be interpreted adequately along process lines. Thus, we will see that process theology cannot adequately reconcile itself with the biblical concept of special revelation because its idea that every act of temporal self-creation is based on past efficient causes does not allow something new (special) in a system that requires all events to be related. We will argue that such disagreement with scripture stems from a failure to conceive the Resurrection of Jesus as an objective act of God in an open universe. Our conclusion is that both men (Ogden and Ford) may be in antithesis to one another, but they share the same dilemma with process theology as a whole: an inability to align themselves with the biblical view of special revelation as an objective event given propositionally and personally by God through scripture and Jesus to all men.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to compare the idea of revelation in the thought of two process theologians--Schubert M. Ogden and Lewis S. Ford. Their concept of revelation is appropriate for our study since I think both men set the boundaries for the way God acts toward his creatures in both a general and special sense in accordance with Process Theology.

Ogden mainly follows the thought of Charles Hartshorne that God is a person. Though Hartshorne followed Whitehead relative to God as bi-polar, he did not accept Whitehead's idea that there is a univocal relation between "God as the primary actual entity and all other actual entities."¹ Rather, he made a modal distinction between God (a necessary being) and the world (a contingent being). Thus, Hartshorne's God is the universal ground for all contingency.² By saying this, he views God as a society of actual entities or a person, since God's body "comprises a whole society of actual entities."³

Ogden follows Hartshorne's idea for a modal distinction between God and the world. He uses the terms "absolute" and "relative" to show how God grounds the world. In terms of revelation, Ogden sees God as an Immanent Individual who can act originally in an authentic revelation to man as a being who can receive and respond to such an act by representing it as a special act.

Ford, on the other hand, follows Whitehead in believing that God is bi-polar as well as that a univocal relation between God (a primary actual entity) and the world (all other actual entities) can be maintained. To Ford, the idea that God is a society of beings can only explain how God is related to the world.⁴ It cannot explain how the world is related to God. Thus, in terms of revelation, Ford considers God to be an actual entity, a divine di-polar subjectivity (defined as the Father) who acts towards all of his creatures. He can also act through a special, contingent, authentic revelation in continuity with the contingent response of humanity.

¹ Harold O. J. Brown, "Process Theology" in Tensions in Contemporary Theology, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and Alan F. Johnson (Chicago: Moody, 1976), 255.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Lewis S. Ford, The Lure of God: A Biblical Background for Process Theism (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 99.

For Ogden, a special act is brought about by a human act, and represents an authentic revelation. Ogden considers such an act to be the renewing⁵ of an original act by re-presentation. For Ford, a special act is given to men by God, who intensifies it in continuity with a contingent human response. This special action is the intensification⁶ of an original act by contingent actualization. So, they agree that God acts in a special sense but differ on how God's action becomes special.

⁵ Schubert M. Ogden, The Point of Christology (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 58-63.

⁶ Ford, The Lure of God, 124.

THE SYSTEMATIC MEANING OF REVELATION

According to Ogden, in his essay, "On Revelation," any account of the meaning of revelation that is to be systematically adequate must pass two tests. These criteria are appropriateness and understandability.

Ogden claims,

Correspondingly, the burden of theological criticism is always to assess conventional rationalizations, thereby eliminating those that can no longer be maintained and, so far as possible, indicating others whereby the claims of the Christian witness may still be vindicated.⁷

Thus, for Ogden the criteria of appropriateness and understandability are two relevant tests which can adequately defend the claims of the Christian witness. We need to discuss each criterion in detail.

The first end which theological reflection must pursue is given by the criterion of appropriateness. A theological statement can pass it by establishing its congruence with the canonical witness (the Jesus-kerygma).⁸ Ogden explains, however, that "the witness of faith of the New Testament" is rather "the object of theological interpretation than its datum and that, therefore all attempts to test the appropriateness of systematic statements are bound to be circular."⁹ So, appropriateness is necessary to establish the adequacy of systematic statements; nevertheless, it is also a circular test and thus insufficient.

Since congruence with the canonical witness (the Jesus-kerygma) is an insufficient test, for Ogden, it cannot be the only criterion for systematic adequacy.¹⁰ Ogden insists that systematic statements also claim to be "meaningful [existential] and true [di-polar theistic]".¹¹ They "render themselves subject to the criterion of understandability."¹² Hence, the second end which theological reflection must pursue is the criterion of

⁷ Schubert M. Ogden, "On Revelation," Our Common History as Christians: Essays in Honor Albert C. Outler, ed. John Deschner, Leroy T. Howe, Klaus Renzel (New York: Oxford University Press), 261-292.

⁸ Schubert M. Ogden, "What is Theology," Journal of Religion 52 (1972).

⁹ Ogden, "On Revelation," 263.

¹⁰ Ogden, "What is Theology," 22.

¹¹ Ogden, "On Revelation," 264.

¹² *Ibid.*, 263.

understandability;¹³ that is, it must defend its meaning and truth "in accordance with completely general criteria, themselves critically established."¹⁴ Ogden admits, however, that this criterion is also circular.¹⁵ Ogden also recognizes that human experience must be verified by human experience before it can become the subject of understanding. Nevertheless, the task of Christian theology is to pursue these two ends, thereby establishing "the fully reflective understanding of the Christian witness of faith as decisive for human existence."¹⁶ In conclusion, a theological assertion (systematic statement) must be appropriate and understandable to the Apostolic witness which is the norm for all theological assertions. However, Ogden recognizes that appropriateness and understandability are relative criteria, not absolute criteria. Each has a distinctive task but each presupposes the other. Ogden, in following Bultmann's lead, maintains that within the New Testament's own idea of revelation, there are, to be sure, two implied ideas.

The first idea, Ogden declares, is that man's salvation "so entirely depends on the saving action of God that without the revelation by which that action occurs the only future of man would be death."¹⁷ On this idea,

not only is every man as such utterly dependent on the prevenient action of God for his authentic life, but that action takes place precisely as a revelation, as a manifestation of God himself to a being capable of receiving and responding to such a manifestation.¹⁸

The second idea which is implied in the New Testament's idea of revelation is that revelation has occurred decisively in Jesus Christ. This idea of revelation (that is, "revelation-incarnation") can be seen in the particular history of Jesus of Nazareth as presented in Scripture.

¹³ Ogden, "What is Theology," 22.

¹⁴ Ogden, "On Revelation," 263.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

He defines the first idea as the "original presentation of God to every human understanding," or original revelation; and the second idea as the "re-presentation of God to men," or special, decisive revelation.¹⁹ Both conceptions are correlated with Ogden's own idea of the two senses in which God acts in history. We will discuss each conception in turn.

¹⁹ Ibid., 264, 269.

ORIGINAL REVELATION

Insofar as religious language is existential and insofar as human experience is not exhausted by sense perception, we must enjoy an internal awareness of ourselves, and of our world as parts of the absolute.²⁰ For we exist as human only because of an inalienable assurance that our lives are both real and significant. Human reflection must understand the absolute so that our elemental confidence can make proper sense; and as a result, religious language results from such reflection.

Reflection means to inquire about certain presuppositions of experience and justify them by common, shared experience. "As one reflects upon his presuppositions and moral experiences, he finds that he believes in God." While it is the nature of myth, but not the New Testament's original intention, to obscure the absolute or the cause it serves, such statements can be both meaningful and true, without at the same time being scientific or historical. The complete **existential-metaphysical** meaning of myth is to illuminate the present, not the past or the future. Therefore, the true purpose of Christian doctrines like creation and redemption is to illuminate each present moment of our existence as a part of the absolute. Thus these doctrines actually teach us that God is the **Being of beings** or unbound love, as decisively re-presented in Jesus Christ, who is the outer word which all men need for the objectification of their becoming.

(The word "re-presents" explains Ogden's idea that Jesus is only a manifestation of salvation. Thus, the event of Jesus himself is conceived by Ogden as a historical occurrence as well as an act of God in history, though not exclusive. However, Jesus as a re-presentation of God is decisive.)

To assume that the only criteria of theological statements (appropriateness and understandability) are **already established with our existence itself** is to declare that the only eternal object of theological or human reflection must be **the mystery** of human existence. This **mystery** is a manifestation of God himself, according to the New Testament's understanding of revelation. Ogden writes,

On this understanding, not only is every man as such utterly dependent on the prevenient action of God for his authentic life, but that action takes place

²⁰ Ogden, "Unbounded Love," *The Perkins School of Theology*, XIX, 3 (Spring, 1967).

precisely as a revelation, as a manifestation of God himself to a being capable of receiving and responding to such a manifestation.²¹

Revelation "in one sense of the word properly designates the original event that is constitutive not only of Christian existence but also of human existence in general or simply as such."²² A concept of revelation, as being meaningful and true, must include an analogical speaking of God, as well as his action. For both original and special revelation have existential significance, and the immediate reference of original revelation refers to man and his **possibilities of decision**, whereas the mediate reference of special revelation refers to the being of God, as Creator and Redeemer. Ogden maintains that Paul, as well as the New Testament as a whole, presupposes that God is "implicitly understood to be not merely one being among others, even the greatest, but in the phrase of the later theological tradition, **the being of all beings**--the one strictly transcendental individual whose individuality is constitutive of reality as such."²³

As the ultimate ground of every event, Ogden asserts that God can be nothing more than our Creator.²⁴ In like manner, to say that God is Redeemer is to say that the ultimate end of every event is the everlasting life of God. "Precisely as transcendent, as the one transcendental individual distinct from all others, God is and must be immanent in all things as their primal ground, even as they are immanent in him as their final end."²⁵ Thus if anything is to be experienced or understood, then God must be experienced. This then brings us to the point of human existence, because the existential question has two aspects -- God and human existence.

We can only exist because of an **inalienable** assurance that our lives are both real and significant, and we can only understand through human reflection the absolute so that our **elemental confidence** can make proper sense. For "one may say that man, as the New Testament intends to speak of him, is a being who not

²¹ Ogden, "On Revelation," 264.

²² Ibid., 264.

²³ Ibid., 265.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ David Brown, Doctrine of God (Basil: Blackwell, 1987), 50.

only exists and experiences but also understands.”²⁶ Ogden writes, “Man is or becomes man only because or insofar as he relates himself understandingly, and thus is in freedom and responsibility, to both his own existence and the world around him.”²⁷

Even though there is a need for a special revelation and a revelation-incarnation that meets such a need, this still does not imply that the revelation in Jesus Christ as an objectification of the ultimate mystery is necessary as constitutive event of our authentic possibility. We must first be understandingly related to God.

Since the ultimate ground of every event is God’s decision of **pure unbounded love**, then he can be nothing more than our Creator; in like manner, to say that God is Redeemer is to say that the ultimate end of every event is the everlasting life of God. Ogden explains that

... if God does and must exist necessarily, and thus must somehow be understood if anything at all is understood, the constitutive event of self-understanding can only include an understanding of God. Man is or becomes man only because or insofar as, in understanding himself and his world, he also relates himself understandingly to God’s gift and demand.”²⁸

So, given the New Testament’s presupposition concerning revelation, “God himself is present to every man simply as such in the event in which, being present to himself and his world, man is ipso facto present to God.”²⁹

Since it is the nature of myth to obscure the absolute or the cause it definitely serves, such statements can become both meaningful and true, without being scientific or historical. And if this is so, “there also is no great difficulty in rationalizing the appropriateness to Scripture of theology’s characteristic acknowledgment throughout most of its long history of something like a ‘natural revelation,’³⁰ or original revelation.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Schubert M. Ogden, “The Reformation that We Want,” Anglican Theological Review, 54/4 (October 1972).

²⁹ Ogden, “On Revelation,” 266.

³⁰ Ibid., 267.

SPECIAL REVELATION

There is such a thing as a difference between a full and adequate revelation of our existence and a constitutive revelation of our authentic existence. As free, we creatures must crave the revelation which fully objectifies our existence. Ogden writes,

As Bultman rightly emphasizes, what the New Testament itself says about revelation includes the further idea that it has occurred decisively in the special event of Jesus Christ, and that again and again takes place in the present in the witness and faith of which that event is the principle as well as the origin...which is to say, the re-presentation of God to men that has taken place through the particular strand of human history of which Jesus of Nazareth is the center³¹

This is the primary sense of revelation in the New Testament. Ogden adds that from New Testament times to the present the sense of revelation that was held most prominent in Christian theology was special revelation. Indeed, there are some that even think that special revelation is the only type there is. He uses Tillich as a representative of such thinking. "Thus it follows that everything religion has to say about God, including his qualities, actions, and manifestations, has a symbolic character and that the meaning of God is completely missed if one takes the symbolic language literally."³² Tillich is acknowledging that, in some sense, revelation is universal, and he implies that special revelation "of some sort of or other is the only type of revelation there is." Tillich considers revelation as the "self-manifestation of ultimate mystery in a special miraculous event received in an ecstatic experience." Ogden writes, "How opposed Tillich is to the whole concept of the original revelation is clear from his rejection of any notion of an inner word or an inner revelation as being a mystical, idealist, spiritualist notion that leads only too easily to rationalism."³³ "Against the doctrine of the inner word," he adds, "Christian theology must maintain the doctrine of the word as a medium of revelation, symbolically the doctrine of the word of God."³⁴ My point here is to show Ogden's misgivings about those

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 125ff. LV.

³⁴ Ibid.

who only speak of special revelation. One cannot forget original revelation. Original revelation, according to Ogden, is constitutive of every human existence. For Ogden, Tillich's view of special revelation overlooked the necessity of original revelation and thus is untenable because it cannot do justice to the idea that God is implicitly our Redeemer. Tillich's concept of special revelation can only show that God is explicitly our Creator and not that God is implicitly our Redeemer. Moreover, Tillich's viewpoint only allows us to speak symbolically of God. Ogden feels that it is necessary to speak of symbolically of God as well. Thus, God is now the one who is explicitly the Creator and implicitly the Redeemer, symbolically.

To employ the distinction used in recent Roman Catholic theology, I could say that what is generally meant by revelation in the theological treatises is not transcendental revelation but categorical (or predicamental revelation).³⁵

Special Revelation As Not Properly Supernatural

In what sense, then, is special revelation necessary? Initially, this question must be approached from the opposite direction. That is, we must determine in what sense special revelation is not necessary. Ogden rejects the view that the revelation in Jesus Christ presents the final truth of Christianity because the New Testament does not characteristically appeal to this particular idea.³⁶ He maintains that the New Testament depicts the idea that both original and special revelations have existential significance. Protestant neo-orthodoxy and progressive Roman Catholic theology concur with this understanding of revelation instead of the traditional understanding of revelation as supernatural knowledge. He contends that "not only Protestant neo-orthodoxy but, increasingly, progressive Roman Catholic theology as well, provide abundant evidence that any understanding of revelation as primarily the communication of supernatural knowledge has now been overcome."³⁷

³⁵ Ogden, "On Revelation," 270.

³⁶ Ibid., 272.

³⁷ Ibid.

Like Rahner, he rejects those ³⁸ who believe in the supernatural occurrence of special revelation.

Rahner argues that special revelation is given in the same implicit fashion as transcendental revelation.

It may be that theological reflection is faced with truths which cannot easily be brought together--the truth [sic], namely, that grace is from without through the particular time-bound intervention of the sacramental sign.³⁹

But to believe in this idea as Rahner suggests is to find oneself in a serious dilemma. That is, one is incapable of explaining the necessity of Jesus Christ since special revelation is given transcendently to every human existence. Ogden explains, "even if there is a "more" to revelation and faith that is strictly supernatural, if this "more" belongs, or, in case of faith, can belong, to man quite apart from Christian revelation, it can hardly serve to explain the necessity of that revelation."⁴⁰ That is, if we accept Rahner's view, then we can possess no type of revelation that can understand and make proper sense of our inalienable assurance as men in the form of incarnational human reflection. To put it simply, we do not have any type of revelation-incarnation or objectification for our existence.

For Ogden there is no distinction between nature and grace in the New Testament (or in the Old).

Even if Catholic theologians could consistently claim more than this, however, they would still be faced with a more serious objection, which also applies to the understanding typical of much Protestant neo-orthodoxy. This is the objection that the whole distinction between nature and grace, the natural and the supernatural, must be regarded with profound suspicion from the standpoint of the New Testament, as well as of Scripture generally.⁴¹

However, he does believe that there is a difference between original and special revelation. Thus, Ogden challenges Tillich and Rahner because, in one way or another, they both deny the difference in original and special revelation; Rahner mixes original and special revelation. He (Rahner) says that grace is within and

³⁸ Ibid., 273.

³⁹ Karl Rahner, "Secular Life and the Sacraments," The Tablet, 22. 6822 and 6823 (1971) in Ogden "On Revelation", 290.

⁴⁰ Rahner, The Tablet, pp. 236ff. and 267f. in Ogden "On Revelation", 273.

⁴¹ Ogden, "On Revelation", 224.

comes from without. But Ogden wants to know that if the grace of that revelation which is within is sufficient, then why do we need the grace that comes from without.

So, in Ogden's opinion, neither traditional Christianity nor the Revisionist can prove adequately to him that special revelation is necessary. Special revelation must be taken to mean that it is the full objectification of original revelation. This is what makes special revelation necessary to him. Also, it allows him to emphasize transcendental revelation and deny that special revelation (categorical revelation) is for Christians today.

The Content of Special Revelation

Special revelation, to be sure, does not have different content from original revelation. Thus, there can be no material difference between original and special revelation.

It is, however, just this claim that special revelation has a different content from original revelation that the New Testament sharply calls into question. This is sufficiently evident from the reflection that, since a merely partial divine relation can, at most, establish a merely partial human responsibility, it cannot possibly be what Paul intends to assert in Rom. 1:18ff. And what does he mean there by the power of God, which he asserts that God has manifested to every man, if not the very thing of which he speaks when he says in a preceding verse that the gospel is the power of God for salvation for everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (vs. 16), or witnesses elsewhere that Christ crucified is precisely Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (I Cor. 1:23-24).⁴²

To Ogden, the content of special revelation as an incarnation is needed, without affirming that it is necessary to authentic existence.⁴³ Moreover, we can claim that the sacrificial life and death of Jesus is necessary without claiming that the content of such revelation can accomplish anything other than manifesting a certain human possibility, which declares God's everlasting purpose to redeem us with his love. To him, the special revelation uses the language of sacrifice as a way of expressing the absolute as myth. The sacrificial work of Christ does not, then, constitute our authentic existence but rather reveals it with full decisiveness.

⁴² Ibid., 275.

⁴³ Ibid.

Denying a distinction between nature and grace, Bultmann had worked out a system by which he could affirm a distinctive “more” of special revelation. For Bultmann maintained that our response to original revelation should be considered as something that lies in the past. We need, therefore, a special revelation to restore our original possibility.

The revelation of God brings no knowledge about the mysteries of other worlds; in fact, it communicates nothing even about God that any reflective person could not know about himself--namely, that man can receive his life by God's grace only in radical solitariness before him. No revelation needs to tell me what God's grace means. One thing alone it tells me, and with that it tells me everything: 'This grace holds good for thee!' And because it tells me this in the words, 'Thy sin is forgiven thee!' it opens my eyes to the fact that the first and last sin of man is to want to be himself by his own power.⁴⁴

Ogden challenges this view also,⁴⁵ claiming that one can “call into question either God's goodness or his power.”⁴⁶ He writes, “either God is after all not who he is assumed to be, or else there is no human being who is ever simply without God's grace to save, and hence without the possibility of authentic faith.”⁴⁷ God's act must be interpreted as the action whereby he participates effectively in his creatures and thus lays “the ground for the next stage of the creative process.”⁴⁸ “For Bultmann's own insistence still stands, that faith is by no means merely a human capacity or disposition that may be more or less fully developed.”⁴⁹ To put it simply, if man is without God's grace, then God does not will that all men should be saved.

⁴⁴ Harden asks, “If Bultmann was inconsistent when he broke with philosophy to affirm the necessity of Christ for man's salvation, as Ogden charges, is not Ogden equally inconsistent when he breaks with philosophy to affirm the necessity of Scriptural revelation for theology? Must not the philosopher consider that Ogden's norm is arbitrary? Is Ogden's theologian bound to a particular text, while the philosopher can gain the same truth by roaming freely through the human experience?” I must respond in the negative. Ogden does not break with philosophy in order to affirm the necessity of scriptural revelation since theology, for Ogden, is correlative in nature--that is, a special revelation is not a new possibility but rather defends philosophy. William Harden, New Directions In Theology Today, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), 48-49. Rudolf Bultmann as quoted in Ogden “On Revelation”.

⁴⁵ Ogden, “On Revelation,” 279.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 280.

⁴⁸ Ogden, “In What Sense Does God Act in History,” 11.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Ogden attempts first and foremost to show the “more” of special revelation and , at the same time, states that God desires all to be saved. He believes that man cannot lose his possibility of authentic life. To state that God acts naturally means that man is never without the possibility of faith. The necessity of special revelation lies in its ability to be an adequate and full response to original revelation.

The kerygma or the revelation of Jesus Christ is, according to Ogden, an “imperative call to **existential decision**, in which case it is demonstrably independent of any particular historical event.”⁵⁰ The kerygma must coincide with original revelation as its objectification or full utterance. That which is important to Ogden is neither the actualization of faith nor the full objectification of it, but rather the possibility of authentic faith as from God himself. To Ogden, this viewpoint “entails neither a superficial understanding of sin nor a simple identification of faith with theistic belief.”⁵¹ (Faith is an implicit presupposition as the necessary condition of a possibility of what one thinks, says, or does.) Such a view allows one to say that “authentic faith in God is indeed more than explicit belief in him, even while insisting that it is and remains every man’s possibility.”⁵²

Moreover, the scriptural witness verifies this idea. For the scriptural witness concludes that the only possibility of authentic faith is the original presentation of God to us.

I am convinced that none of the rationalizations of Christian revelation as necessary even to the possibility of man’s authenticity can continue to be maintained—and that, not because they all fail to meet certain criteria of meaning and truth but because, as I have tried to indicate, they do not pass the primary test of agreeing with the scriptural witness.⁵³

Special revelation separates original revelation into different traditions.

Granted that original revelation, and thus the possibility of authentic faith, is constitutive of every human existence as such, it by no means follows that

⁵⁰ Schubert M. Ogden, “Bultmann’s Demythologizing and the Problem of Theology and Philosophy,” Journal of Religion 37 (1957), 169.

⁵¹ Ogden, “On Revelation,” 281.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 281.

men universally are explicitly aware, with full and adequate consciousness, of this fact and all that it involves.⁵⁴

When God actualizes his essence in every creature and when every creature reflects and expresses God's action, then every creature becomes what it is. "Such religion as he [man] has, as distinct from the faith of which it is the objectification, is not natural but historical, and so available to him only as one religion among others, as one more or less reflective response to God's original revelation."⁵⁵ He goes on to state that, "at the base of every religion, as its origin and principle, is some particular occasion of insight, of reflective grasp through concept and symbol, of the mystery manifested in original revelation."⁵⁶ It is clear to Ogden that we need Jesus Christ for our becoming. Therefore, we must define Jesus as an objectification of God's unboundless love. If this is true, Ogden maintains, special revelation must be taken as that which is for all humanity. By stating this, Ogden intends to eliminate the idea that Jesus is necessary for the Christian believer only.

Special Revelation as the "Outer Word"

All religions exist on the basis of some event of special revelation, for our understanding of ourselves is reflective and becomes clear only when it is properly objectified. Hence, Ogden argues that special revelation is necessary for all; it is by no means only for Christians. All men have original possibility but they are not aware of it explicitly. Thus, as humans, not merely as Christians, we need special revelation in order to objectify our existence. That is, we can only live by the word or special revelation. Ogden explains:

Although it is often obscured in theological discussions, there is an important difference between affirming something to be necessary to the full and adequate revelation of our existence and affirming the necessity of that same thing for the very constitution of our existence in its authentic possibility.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid., 282.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 283.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ogden, "The Reformation is What We Want," 267.

The principal task of human reflection is to understand original revelation, to express that our lives are real as well as ultimately significant.⁵⁸ “Consequently, insofar as the God who is presented to him in all his experience and understanding is also represented to him through explicit concepts and symbols, he is confronted with a special revelation that may indeed claim to be decisive for his existence.”⁵⁹ He states, “inevitably, then, there is the wide variety of religious insights and traditions, each with its claim to be true.”⁶⁰ In principle, we are all able to re-present God. This is so only if what we re-present actually does signify God’s action as Creator and Redeemer, as the ultimate reality who is unbounded love, as gift and demand. Hence, we, through the outer word of God’s love, re-present our understanding of God’s primordial action.

Moreover, according to Ogden, we re-present God’s action itself. Ogden proclaims, “indeed, we may go further and say that, in this case, man’s action actually is God’s action . . .”⁶¹

Human actions indicate what we actually are. They are self-representations in history. Yet, whenever one of our acts expresses the deep reflection that God is Creator and Redeemer, then such an act is unlike other acts.⁶² Such an action might be a symbolic and intentional act of word or deed. When particular religious symbols appropriately re-present God’s attribute action as Creator and Redeemer, these religious words and deeds in turn become special acts of God.

But these intentional religious symbols or special acts are not the only acts of God. All actions are, inasmuch as they are received by someone as re-presenting God’s di-polar attributes of Creation and Redemption, acts of God, since it is the nature of all creatures to declare God’s being and actions. Now some, Ogden argues, may say that we can only discern the symbolic meaning of events in special revelation. But this is not the case, he responds. For him, special revelation is derived, not original, and we should not argue

⁵⁸ John B. Cobb, Jr. and David Ray Griffin, Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976).

⁵⁹ Ogden, “On Revelation,” 283.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 284.

⁶¹ Ogden, “In What Sense Does God Act in History,” 14.

⁶² Ibid., 15.

that God's action is found only in special revelation since it is, at most only human confrontation with events.

Whenever an event is thought to express God as Creator and Redeemer, it is unlike like other events. Events of words and deeds are such special acts of God. When particular religious symbols appropriately represent God as Creator and Redeemer, they are special acts.

Any event is an act of God insofar as it is received by someone as God's action. It is, thus, an act of God for it is in the nature of all creatures to declare God's being and action. However, an event can "misrepresent the common structure of all our experiences" and, therefore, it cannot be considered as an act of God.

The Necessity of Special Revelation

We must affirm that special revelation is needed without affirming that such event is necessary to authentic existence: we must affirm that this revelation is necessary without affirming that it can accomplish anything other than declaring a certain human possibility. "Although such revelation cannot be necessary to the constitution of human existence, it can very well be necessary to the objectification of existence, in the sense of its full and adequate understanding at the level of explicit thought and speech."⁶³ Ogden writes, "Not only is there no other light shining in Jesus than has always already shined in the creation, but no saving act of God occurs in him other than that which never fails to occur as soon and as long as there is any distinctively human being."⁶⁴

As Kierkegaard understood it, there can only be two understandings of authentic existence. Ogden points out that:

We may observe, to begin with, that Kierkegaard's formulation of the alternatives in this connection is on the face of it inexhaustive.⁶⁵ As he presents them, there are two basically different understandings of existence

⁶³ Ibid., 284.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 285.

⁶⁵ Soren Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments: Or a Fragment of Philosophy, Trans. David F. Swenson and Howard V. Hong (rev. ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962) pp. 18f. In Ogden, "On Revelation," n. 24.

between which one must choose: the Socratic understanding according to which no event is constitutive of man's authentic possibility. He already possesses it implicitly prior to any events. Kierkegaard's own understanding, according to which some event is constitutive, is that man alone is given the possibility that he does not already possess, not even implicitly.⁶⁶

But Ogden considers a third alternative. He adds,

There remains, if only as 'a project of thought,' a third understanding, according to which every event is constitutive of man's possibility, because, while it is in no way his eternal possession, it is given to him at least implicitly in every event that is constitutive of his existence.⁶⁷

Whereas Socrates maintains that no type of event brings salvation, Kierkegaard perceives that salvation must come by way of some decisive event. Ogden discerns that man's authentic possibility is constitutive of every event. By choosing the third alternative, Ogden does not want to identify any theistic beliefs as essential for salvation. Ogden sees Kierkegaard as setting things up so that this would be the case. Hence, he challenges Kierkegaard's either-or. For Ogden, man has original revelation but needs special revelation only as a reminder or objectification, and, thus, as a guide to adjudicate all the claims and counter-claims of various religions.

Special revelation cannot be the "explication of the eternal truths of theism."⁶⁸ As "nothing other than the full and adequate objectification of original revelation, original revelation itself is always and only an event--an event occurring in time, and so nothing merely eternal."⁶⁹ "As the objectification of God's original revelation in every present, it is the re-presentation of his love itself as the ever new gift and demand of my existence."⁷⁰

In sum: What Christian revelation reveals to man is nothing new, since such truths as it makes explicit must already be known to him implicitly in every moment of his existence. But that this revelation occurs does reveal

⁶⁶ Ogden, "On Revelation," 286.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 286.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 286-287,

⁷⁰ Ibid., 287

something new to him in that, as itself event it is the occurrence in his history of the transcendent event of God's love.⁷¹

As historical beings, we need Christian revelation. Ogden interprets Christian revelation as relatively necessary. That is, Christian revelation is relatively necessary to human existence, not to the object of Christian faith.

Hence, that which makes Christian revelation a revelation is the fact of "its occurrence and that it is with respect to this fact that it is the decisive revelation of something new: God's 'new creation' in Christ, and so man's authentic possibility of 'faith working through love' (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15, 5:6)."⁷²

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 288.

REVELATION AND THE CHRISTOLOGICAL ASSERTION

According to Ogden, the external criterion of authority is not the New Testament or even the Old, but rather the apostolic witness which is prior to the tradition of the New Testament.⁷³ The apostolic witness is itself the norm of appropriateness. It bears witness to Jesus, the real subject of the Christological Assertion.

Ogden explains that:

What is central in the Jesus-kerygma is the actual witness of Jesus himself, his proclamation of the nearness of God's reign, his table fellowship with the outcasts in anticipation of the eschatological meal, his exorcisms of demons, his summons to faith with the promise or threat that the coming Son of Man will judge according to his hearers' present response to his own words and deeds. In other words, so far as the Jesus-kerygma is concerned, Jesus is re-presented as the one who through his words and deeds in the present places everyone whom he encounters in the immediate presence of God whose gift and demand is love.⁷⁴

He defines the apostolic witness as that which is accessible to us by "historical-critical analysis of the earliest layer of Christian tradition or kerygma," from which "alone the true canon within the canon is to be discerned."⁷⁵ It is to be discerned only by critical interpretation. Moreover, it is the witness to which theological assertion (or in our case any systematic account of revelation) must be appropriate. He writes, "Accordingly, the witness to which theological assertions must be appropriate is not scriptural witness typically spoken of in most post liberal Protestant theology but, rather, the apostolic witness, which is to be discerned by critical interpretation of this earliest layer of Christian tradition or kerygma."⁷⁶ Hence, the basis of the traditional source of authority, scripture and tradition, is the apostolic witness, which is found in the

⁷³ John Hick, "Jesus or The Apostolic Message?" Journal of Religion, 64/1, 1984, 362-368.

⁷⁴ Schubert M. Ogden, unpublished lecture "On Christ," p. 4 as cited in John J. O'Donnell, Trinity and Temporality (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 57.

⁷⁵ Schubert M. Ogden, "The Authority of Scripture for Theology," Interpretation 30 (July 1976), 258.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 258.

New Testament.⁷⁷ Thus the apostolic witness plays the role of theological norm, since the existential-historical Jesus, or the true subject of Christological Assertion authorizes it.⁷⁸

If this witness is to be found in the New Testament, the authority of scripture is no greater than its higher authority--the apostolic witness.⁷⁹ For "the locus of the *auctoritas canonica* is not the New Testament itself, to say nothing of the Old, but the apostolic witness that is prior to the New Testament, although accessible to us today only by way of historical reconstruction from it."⁸⁰ He writes that "relative to Christ himself and to the apostolic witness that alone is directly authorized by him, there is no difference in principle, but only in fact, between the authority of Scripture, on the one hand, and that of the church's tradition and magisterium on the other."⁸¹

The early church's explicit Christology was a response to Jesus' proclamation of utter decisiveness to be God's gift and demand. He confronted his hearers with God's prevenient action. Since Jesus only affirmed an implicit Christology, there is no explicit Christology to be found in the apostolic witness.⁸² He explains,

Even though Jesus hardly thought and spoke of himself as the Christ or the Son of Man, he evidently did point to himself in his word as being of decisive significance, in that already through him God was confronting his hearers with the gift and demand of boundless love and thus with the possibility of authentic existence in faith. Consequently, in thinking and speaking of Jesus as the Christ or as the Son of Man, the early church affirmed explicitly, in such terms and categories as were available for the purpose, Jesus' own implicit claim to be the decisive revelation of God's love.⁸³

⁷⁷ Ibid., 252.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 256.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 252.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Schubert M. Ogden, The Point of Christology (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 120.

⁸³ Ibid.

Thus, the church added extraneous assumptions about Christ to the decisive engagement, by which he confronted them with God's gift and demand of unboundless love. "By affirming that Jesus' own Christology was at most implicit, it takes account of the fact that there is no explicit Christology in the earliest stratum of Christian witness."⁸⁴ This means that the apostolic witness makes assumptions about Jesus "that are empirical-historical in character."⁸⁵ Even so, what it really teaches is that Jesus has decisive significance. Ogden records, "They not only seem to assume that Jesus proclaimed or taught certain things or acted in certain ways, but also that he had a certain understanding of himself and his ministry that led him to confront his hearers with an extraordinary claim."⁸⁶ Thus, according to the apostolic witness, Jesus is not only a special act of God, but also He is a decisive act or final revelation of God's action--he has distinct revelatory power.⁸⁷

For Ogden, we only have inferences from the secondary sources because the early Christians were interested in reportage about Jesus. Thus, the only sources for Jesus are the secondary witness of faith. Ogden maintains that post-Bultmannian theology or proponents of the new quest for the historical Jesus left things the way they found them and Marxen recognized this. However, Ogden contends, that which is empirical-historical for Marxen is the witness itself, or assertions about Jesus as He really is. Ogden desires that we look behind scripture's formulations and find the Apostolic witness. So, "the quest for the historical Jesus" should be taken as a quest for the Apostolic witness. That is, the norm (scripture, tradition) does not come from a historical source (Apostolic witness), rather, the Apostolic witness is the norm of appropriation. The event itself is contained within the witness to the event since Ogden holds the view that there is no operational distinction between Jesus as He really was and Jesus as He is represented in the earliest source.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 58.

⁸⁷ Ogden, "In What Sense Does God Act in History," 16.

Hence, the apostolic witness makes assumptions about what Jesus really is--special or final revelation. Therefore decisive revelation authorizes special revelation, and special revelation in turn declares that decisive revelation is the source from which it derives its authority. He declares,

Assuming, as we must, that even this earliest stratum of Jesus-tradition is witness of faith and not historical reportage, we have to allow for the possibility that even what clearly seem to be assumptions about Jesus as he actually was are really assertions about Jesus as he truly is--which is to say, as he is believed to be by those who by means of such assertions intend to bear witness to him as the decisive re-presentation of God.⁸⁸

Thus apostolic witness bears witness to Jesus as the decisive representation of God. In Him, "the ultimate truth about our existence before God is normatively represented or revealed."⁸⁹

Further, everything that is to be Christian (including the apostolic witness) must originate from the christ-event. For

the event that the New Testament witness as such means in referring to Jesus does indeed belong to the origin of the Christian church, and so is an actual happening, prior to and independent of not only their own faith and witness, but even the original faith and witness of the apostles in which everything Christian originates.⁹⁰

The point of Christology is an existential point, and Christological assertions are existential assertions.⁹¹ The constitutive event is the revelation to which the Christian community responds with the Christological assertion--Jesus is the Christ. Historic Christianity construes the religion about Jesus, not the religion of Jesus, as normative. However, Ogden thinks that historic Christianity, by maintaining that the religion of Jesus itself was explicitly Christological, falls into the same deception as liberalism, which believed that the religion of Jesus was normative. Both were deceived, he claims. Historic Christianity speaks of "certain historical conclusions" relative to a God-man Savior, whereas liberalism speaks of the same

⁸⁸ Schubert M. Ogden, "The Point of Christology," 58.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ogden, "In What Sense Does God Act in History," 16.

⁹¹ Ogden, "The Point of Christology."

conclusion with respect to Jesus as merely human. He maintains that both positions have difficulties because some theologians have adequately challenged the assumption that we know of Jesus' life from the Gospels.

In the Christological assertion, "Jesus is the Christ", Jesus, as the subject term, does not refer to a past event or a potential revelation, but rather He is a present event or revelation. Ogden asserts that

what is meant by the subject term 'Jesus' in the constitutive Christological assertion is not 'the so-called historical Jesus' but rather, 'the historical biblical [sc. apostolic] Christ.' The referent of that term is not some past figure or event behind the apostolic witness but the present figure and event constitutive of and, in another sense, constituted by that very witness.⁹²

That is, if "Jesus," as the subject term in the assertion, "Jesus is the Christ," were referred to as a past figure or event, then the objective referent is the historical Jesus and not the Christ as re-presented by Jesus. As such, the kerygma would refer to the past figure, Jesus, who actualized the Christ, instead of proclaiming the Christ himself.

Jesus must be taken as the one to whom the apostolic witness bears witness; namely, the one who is the divine word addressed to us as actual occurrence. The outer word represents Jesus, not as a past figure who actualized faith, but as the present event of the apostolic Christ, a re-presentation of God himself. The teachings and death of Jesus represent the events of special revelation qua unity of past event and present event. The kerygma must be taken as something instrumental to the revelatory event.

The Jesus-kerygma does not represent Christ as a new possibility. All men receive the authentic possibility of God himself in every event. Ogden records, "There is not the slightest evidence that God has acted in Christ in any way different from the way in which he primordially acts in every other event."⁹³ God does not act differently in Christ than in any other event. Christ by no means reveals a new possibility to us, but only incarnates the unique event which is given to everyone implicitly. Christian revelation is an

⁹² For Ogden, "to say that Jesus is the preacher of mankind in the sense of the decisive historical manifestation of the essential God-man relationship is to say something quite different than that he is an accidental occasion through which some timeless and impersonal truth can be appropriated by the intellect. Indeed, it is to say nothing less, though also nothing more, than that in him the eternal Existence or thou in whom all truth is grounded is himself personally present." Ogden as quoted in C.J. Curtis, Contemporary Protestant Thought (New York: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1970), 72. Ogden's unpublished lecture "On Christ," p. 5 in O'Donnell, 63.

⁹³ Schubert M. Ogden, "Bultmann's Demythologizing and the Problem of Theology and Philosophy," Journal of Religion, 37 (1957), 159, 161.

event which does reveal the action of God himself in his history. Yet that which is revealed in Jesus is implicitly known to other men.

We need Christian revelation to reassure us of this basic confidence. We need the revelation in Jesus to proclaim the unbounded love of God which is given to us since revelation comes via religious symbols. Jesus Christ is the decisive Christian symbol. For the purpose of the revelation of Jesus is to define salvation, not actualize it: "The function of Christian revelation is not to limit man's consciousness of the sacred but to define it."⁹⁴

Ogden equates the special act of the human word with the revelation of the divine word addressed to us. If Jesus is the Christ, then his resurrection is God's action to us. The New Testament represents it as something instrumental to God's action, but it is God's own witness to Jesus as decisive.

Resurrection does not mean that 'the act of God' which the faith of Easter signifies is yet another historical happening in space and time, subsequent to the events of Jesus' life and death. The New Testament's representations of it as though it were such a happening are undeniably mythological and demand to be critically interpreted--and that, primarily for the sake of expressing more appropriately its own distinctive reality as an act of God. The crucial point, however, is that the witness of faith, which did originate in at some time after. Jesus' crucifixion is by no means something completely independent or primary. On the contrary, it is by its very nature the response to another and altogether different 'witness' on which it absolutely depends, namely, the 'self attestation' of the risen Lord, or as the New Testament also expresses it, God's own testimony to the decisive significance of Jesus and his cross (cf. Rom. 1:4).⁹⁵

The revelation in Jesus' life qua actualization of God's purpose, is therefore not independent of the resurrection of Christ. Similarly, the "deity" of Jesus is not independent of the "humanity" of God. Ogden declares that:

Thus, what I properly mean when I assert that Jesus is 'divine' is that the possibility here and now represented to me in the Christian witness of faith is God's own gift and demand to my existence. On the other hand, what I properly mean when I assert that God is 'human' is that I am here and now

⁹⁴ Schubert M. Ogden, "Christliche Theologie und die neue Religiosität," in Chancen der Religion, ed. Rainer Volp (Gutersloh: Gutersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1975), p. 172 as cited by O'Donnell in Trinity and Temporality, 66.

⁹⁵ Ogden, The Reality of God, p. 217-218.

actually confronted with this possibility, that is actually re-presented to me as a historical event and hence is not merely as idea or a general truth.⁹⁶

Thus, Jesus is the Christ not simply in the sense that he actualized and thereby vindicated the possibility of faith, but rather because he makes it present to me as my possibility.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

SUMMARY OF OGDEN

Ogden's thought relative to revelation started with the idea that a theological statement (systematic statement) must be appropriate and understandable. Moreover, Ogden admits that any attempt to test the appropriateness and understandability is necessarily circular. His reason for using these two tests stem from the idea of many that special revelation is the most prominent form of revelation. Some even suggest that it is the only type that exists. But this idea of revelation fails not only because it cannot pass these two tests, but also because it does not agree with the scriptural witness, Ogden claims. To him, the scriptural witness says that original revelation is as important as special revelation. If this is the case, in what sense is special revelation necessary? According to Ogden, the different understandings of special revelation set forth by scholars from various traditions could not adequately prove that special revelation is new. In place of these, Ogden insists that his idea of special revelation as an objectification of original revelation is adequate. One defense of this claim is that only his view agrees with the apostolic witness. For Ogden, the apostolic witness gives us an adequate picture of Jesus as proclaimer. That is, Jesus does not reveal anything new in his revelation since every man already has what Jesus objectifies.

FORD: INTRODUCTION

Lewis Ford works under a metaphysical system that requires four points which are necessary for our discussion: (1) Perfect being is not immutable; (2) Not all properties of God are necessary; (3) The Divine nature cannot exclude all contingency; (4) Creaturely freedom requires an open future. That is, God's knowledge is dependent on what happens in the world. However, God has a necessary side as well. We can only know of this side of God by way of metaphysics. Rational religion, in order to be understandable, must be built on ordinary metaphysics. This leads us to the concept of general revelation since it can account for God's necessary action vis-a-vis all creatures. Without general revelation, we cannot understand how God provides lures towards which the world can aspire. God's revelation does not extend solely to our human situation, for that would mean that the revelation addressed to humanity is the only possible type of revelation. It is not.

General Revelation

The general revelation of God through divine persuasion is not limited to the contingent human species. "It extends to the entire created order, and constitutes the means whereby God directs the evolutionary process, both here and on distant planets. It addresses both subhuman creatures and extra-terrestrial intelligent species, each after its own kind."⁹⁷

Here, Ford maintains, we need to make a distinction between the Logos and the creative Word. The Logos is described as the totality of divine aims;⁹⁸ it ranges from the largest to the smallest, the relevant to the irrelevant ordinary aims. The creative Word is interpreted as "those aims capable of addressing an entire species by infusing in them a novel order bringing about the emergence of a more advanced species."⁹⁹ That creative Word, specifically addressed to humanity, is the Christ. Thus, the creative Word must be interpreted,

⁹⁷ Lewis S. Ford, The Lure of God: A Biblical Background for Process Theism (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 100.

⁹⁸ Ford says that the Logos is "noncompetitive," "providing for the structure and order of the world" The Logos must be recognized as a divine speaker which evokes creaturely response and must be seen as a "necessary factor in the creative process," though "it need not be the one sufficient cause." Lewis S. Ford, Evangelical Appraisals of Process Theism, Christian Scholar Review, p. 153.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

of course, as only that part of the Logos which addresses a specific species; which is to say theologically, Christ is the creative Word addressed to humankind.

Ford follows Whitehead's idea that "events and activities are primary, while enduring substantial personhood is derivative."¹⁰⁰ He writes, "No concrete, actual event, moreover, can be understood as either wholly the work of God or the work of man (or any other creature),"¹⁰¹ for each event demands an aim provided by God to be realized as well as its own power to actualize such an aim. He further writes,

Without God there would be simply chaos, for individual occasion would lack any ordering principle to initiate its process of integration, but without the world, God's aims for the world would never be realized, which can be effective only so far as it elicits concrete response.¹⁰²

Hence, an individual occasion requires two¹⁰³ types of power.¹⁰⁴ They are the persuasive power of God and the occasion's own power, or creaturely power. Therefore, persuasion "entails response, not conformation, and the response is free either to embrace or to reject the novel aim."¹⁰⁵

Though the level of response varies in each creature, response is greatly needed on all levels. Through the response of each creature, evolutionary advance is made possible. Hence, there must be some type of response in each event, however minute. Ford explains,

Yet if there is to be any emergence of greater complexity, then there must be at least a modicum of spontaneous response possible even on the atomic and molecular levels, occasionally permitting the actualization of some evolutionary advance. Divine persuasion is the urge to maximize the possibilities inherent in such indeterminate response.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 50.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ford maintains that God's power is to be shared with others; there must be different types of casual power, "one of which is God's." These powers are (1) past casual conditions; (2) present free decisions (which unify past causal conditions); (3) divine aim (which guides present decisions). Also, see Ford's Contrasting Conceptions of Creation in Review of Metaphysics 45 (September 1991), p. 89.

¹⁰⁴ Lewis S. Ford, "Rhetoric of Divine Power," p. 234.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 59.

This, Ford contends, is a form of Neo-Lamarckianism, since each creature through inheritance acquires some type of characteristic “which is then transmitted by means of efficient causality to subsequent generations.”¹⁰⁷

This idea further shapes Ford’s conception of general revelation. He states, “insofar as God has an eternal, permanent essence, this is exemplified in every reaction where there is an adequate response to God. This is the character of God’s general revelation, and is fully accessible to metaphysical investigation.”¹⁰⁸

Thus, creaturely response in conjunction with the appropriation of novel aims from God on all levels becomes “the chief means whereby divine purposes become effective in the world.”¹⁰⁹ Ford quickly points out, however, that divine persuasion is opportunistic, not coercive in that “there is no necessity that every creature must embody the maximum of its potentialities.”¹¹⁰ He maintains that “whatever happens, happens as the result of the creature’s self-activity in utilizing its casual conditions to achieve its ends, but God is everywhere and at all times seeking that which is best, given the circumstances.”¹¹¹ He concludes, “Such gracious activity will not always be thwarted, so that evolutionary advance as actualized through free creaturely response, gradually comes into being.”¹¹² Through general revelation, God supplies the impetus toward complexity. Hence, God is not an efficient cause. God is the one seeking the best, given the circumstances. When efficient causes, an aim from God, and the possibilities inside of free response are consistent, God can now guarantee that the “complexed” will come from the simple.¹¹³ Free response and an

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Cobb and Griffin, Process Theology, p. 19. To Whitehead, “the things that endure are series of these occasions of experience. Electrons, molecules, and cells are examples of such enduring things. Likewise the human soul, or stream of experience, is composed of a series of distinct occasions of experience.” Also, Ford, The Lure of God, 54.

¹⁰⁹ Ford, The Lure of God, 60.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ This is one reason that science needs God because chance cannot guarantee that the “complexed” comes from the simple. Ford maintains that God cooperates with others; creation and actualization can be integrated into a series of “temporal, immanent acts of self-creation.” p. 153.

aim from God become efficient causes for another free response. God uses these efficient causes¹¹⁴ to introduce divine purposes, and these purposes become effective in the world.

General revelation is the event whereby God freshly and continuously speaks in creation to each of his creatures, so that each creature brings forth the best that is within its particular situation. This event illuminates the dynamic character of the Word, the Logos. This word is spoken in creation to human and subhuman hearers alike, addresses us now, and for the same purpose, "which is the evocation of ever increasing fulfillment of creaturely possibility."¹¹⁵ Ford writes, "That Word spoken in the creation of the natural order also brought Israel into existence and that Word incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth becomes the means whereby the church, the body of Christ, was created."¹¹⁶

To Ford, Israel was not only aware of the divine actions of the Logos in its own creation but also it was cognizant of the Logos as the same effective power which shaped the natural order.¹¹⁷ Moreover, he maintains, if we examine the creation of Israel in the context of the Exodus event, we can see not only the "intervening power of Yahweh" but also the Logos as the divine word that calls forth the Israelites' obedience. He explains,

The covenant between Yahweh and Israel clearly symbolized the reciprocal character of effective response. Israel's emergence and continued existence depended upon the conjoint presence of the divine Word and its own faithfulness to that Word, and this may serve as the paradigm for understanding creation.¹¹⁸

"The history of God's dealing with Israel can no longer serve as the all-embracing horizon for our understanding of God, which must now be correlated with a greatly expanded world history, a scientific

¹¹⁴ Lewis S. Ford, "Evangelical Appraisals of Process Theism," *Christian Scholar's Review*, p. 149-163.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ "Christian history builds upon Israelite history". Marjorie G. Suchocki, God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 90.

understanding of nature and man, and a drastically altered social and ethical situation.”¹¹⁹ Only Process Theism, then, can provide a sufficient context for understanding God’s activity since only it can do justice to these demands, without losing Israel’s witness. Taken alone, Israel as a context is too restrictive, since it only deals with God’s involvement with humanity. But, to Ford, humanity is only one particular species since he propounds a belief that there may be Christ events on other planets.¹²⁰ The Hebrew Bible, according to Ford, shows that coercion cannot be found in divine action. God’s power must interact with His people. Ford states that our understanding of God cannot be based on one context, however; other traditions and contexts will follow Israel, so we need a way to correlate them all. One way to correlate all of these contexts is to conceive of God’s activity primarily in terms of persuasion. To speak of God’s activity in terms of persuasion does two things. First, it shows that creation without control is credible. Second, it enlarges the idea of freedom, acknowledging that all creatures have some degree of freedom. We are, at the moment, concerned with such broadly construed freedom, the implication of which is that God’s dialogue is not limited to man but is manifest in the entire evolutionary process. But, in order for God to address and experience all creatures, He must have both necessary and contingent features, according to Ford.

Philosophy is recognized as the proper domain for exploring the necessary aspects of God. But philosophy cannot do justice to His contingent dimension. Thus it needs a complement. Ford suggests that the Bible can do justice to explaining God’s contingent aspects.¹²¹ Even though the particularities¹²² in the Bible are recognized as an “embarrassment” to universality, Scripture still can be recognized as the “primary source for man’s involvement with God in history.”¹²³ He writes, “The radical contingency of this

¹¹⁹ Ford, The Lure of God, 23.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 16, and Ford, “Evangelical Appraisals to Process Theism,” p. 155.

¹²¹ Ibid., 123

¹²² Cobb and Griffin, Process Theology, 35-36. Religious truths “which are explication of universal aspects of experience have importance in the same way. For example, they lift into consciousness certain aspects of the universal experience of deity, such as divine grace. . . . Christian doctrine, by selecting certain features of experience for conscious emphasis, shapes attitudes, purposes, and commitments, and even the structure of human existence itself.”

¹²³ Ford, The Lure of God, 123.

involvement, known to us through the scriptures, thus precisely complements the abstract conceptuality process theism offers, while this conceptuality in turn illumines the way in which we today can appropriate this rich heritage.”¹²⁴

Thus, if Scripture is actually contingent history,¹²⁵ we must, somehow, account for man’s “free response,” he suggests, which “in turn undercuts the traditional assumption that God controls the future (or at least knows it in detail), and has everything planned out.”¹²⁶ God is “the power of the future operative in the present, providing possibilities which, if fully actualized in our creaturely response, will bring about the achievement of the good.”¹²⁷ “This is the power of divine lure, expressed in the vision of the future reigning of God.”¹²⁸

This divine lure was heightened in the event of Jesus, for his life, death, and resurrection gave rise to a new plane of creation in reality, a transhuman community, defined as the body of Christ. By Christ we do not mean the Logos, for the Logos is recognized as the totality of divine aims. Rather, Christ is that part of the creative Word addressed to man. Ford defines this contingent address as the emergent body of Christ, which can only be uncovered through historical recital (revelation). Let us examine Ford’s usage of biblical tradition and process theism as these relate to the history of God’s activity in Jesus and the Logos, as presented in John’s gospel.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Cobb and Griffin, Process Theology, 40. “Nevertheless, our immediate experience is the final court of appeal. We have faith in the continued fruitfulness of returning to the first accounts of and reactions to Jesus’ life for new insights because of the repeated fruitfulness of return in the past. But this fruitfulness must finally prove itself in our own experience, or faith in the continuing relevance of Jesus will decline in company with other beliefs that do not ring true for us.” Ford, The Lure of God, p.123.

¹²⁷ Ford, The Lure of God, 123.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 124.

The fourth gospel errs, according to Ford, when it identifies Jesus¹²⁹ as the “second member of the Trinity” since “there cannot be distinct subjectivities within the Godhead.”¹³⁰ Ford maintains that, according to Whitehead, whatever has actual unity enjoys its own subjectivity. Separate subjectivities would be separate actualities, and vice versa. Hence, “a divine person enjoying his own subjectivity would be a separate actuality, thus leading to tritheism.”¹³¹ If there are three persons in the Godhead, then each person would have his own body. That is, Jesus and the Holy Spirit would be persons with their own bodies, similar to the Father. This is a necessary conclusion for process theism but not for historical Christianity, which maintains that God is Spirit, and thus He does not possess a body. Moreover, he writes, “Substance in the sense of divine substratum in which three persons inhere is just that sort of vacuous actuality devoid of its own subjectivity that Whitehead rejects.”¹³² Thus, Ford rejects the Latin interpretation of the Trinity: “one substance in three persons,” and accepts the Greek version: “one actuality having three distinct aspects.”¹³³ Ford says that a “person” is not an individual substratum but a specific role that someone plays. He explains, in terms of Duns Scotus, “These natures are formally distinct. They are not really distinct, for this would imply the possibility of separate existence nor are they merely logically distinct.”¹³⁴ Whereas tritheism leads to three gods with their own bodies, the idea of three sharing the same body is also inaccurate to Ford. Therefore, he opts for a Greek version of modalism. But historic Christianity’s interpretation of the trinity does not imply or even suggest that the three members share a body. For traditional Christianity, a body is not

¹²⁹ Jesus cannot be the Logos for two reasons. First, the Logos is a “timeless principle of order and purpose in the universe.” Second, process theism sees deity as a substance which cannot merge with humanity as a substance. *Process Theology*, ed. R.H. Nash (Baker, 1987), pp. 66 and 67. Thus, process theology interprets the idea of God-man savior or the Incarnation as the immanence of God in Jesus. William N. Pittenger, *Catholic Faith in a Process Perspective* (Mary Knoll, New York: Orbis, 1981), p. 95.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

a necessary requirement for personhood. The three persons are distinct, though they have the same nature. But nature should not be interpreted as something material, like a body.

In summation, Ford believes that the Christian idea of the trinity ultimately leads to tritheism, and, thus, he rejects the idea of three persons in one substance. However, he admits that his alternative (one actuality, different aspects) leads to Arianism, something he tries to correct in a later work. For Arianism would make two subjectivities relative to God and Christ.¹³⁵ He tries to solve this dilemma by presenting the idea of mutual transformation of Jesus and God.¹³⁶ That is, without Jesus, God cannot become the Christ; without God, Jesus cannot become the Christ.¹³⁷ This idea supposedly keeps his theory from collapsing into Arianism since Jesus is absorbed¹³⁸ into God and God is experienced by Jesus. This mutual transformation does not allow Jesus to be transhuman.¹³⁹ This brings us to the matter of Christ.¹⁴⁰

Ford insists that Christ has subjectivity but only in the event of his resurrection,¹⁴¹ not as a pre-existent subject. He enjoys subjectivity as “that transparent medium which most intensely communicates God’s aim to the Christian.”¹⁴² Ford believes that “humanity is a contingent species, which need never have

¹³⁵ Ford maintains that “Christ is the visible image of God.” God as the Father is also an image of God. Ford, unpublished article, “Christ as the Mutual Transformation of God and Jesus,” p. 4.

¹³⁶ God is temporarily transformed by Jesus. Ibid., p. 2.

¹³⁷ “Christ” denotes the transformation of both God and Jesus, having both as necessary constituents. Ford, “Christ as the Mutual Transformation of God and Jesus,” p. 8.

¹³⁸ Jesus’ life and death affects God. Ibid., p. 3.

¹³⁹ Christ and the God of Israel are “equally images of God.” Also, they are “salvific images for their respective communities.” Ibid. p. 7.

¹⁴⁰ Ford’s idea of Christ is elaborated in the work, “Christ as the Mutual Transformation of God and Jesus.” Both this article and The Lure of God “stress the role of the risen Christ as key to New Testament thought,” both “appreciate the importance of temporal transformation,” and both go behind “the reported visions of the risen Christ to the imperceptible reality these refer to.” Ford, “Christ as the Mutual Transformation of God and Jesus,” p. 10. However, The Lure of God sees the risen Christ as an inner subjectivity, the dynamic coordinating agency of the body of Christ. His body is a “new evolutionary emergence of which Christians constitutes its members,” p. 10. This is Arianism. The Lure of God, p. 95. Also, The Lure of God represents God and Christ as two distinct subjectivities. Christ is neither divine or human. He is a transhuman creature. This new article corrects the Arian solution “by merging the two subjectivities of God and Christ into one.” Thus, he (Ford) accounts for the “temporal emergence of Christ as the mutual transformation of both God and Jesus,” p. 10.

¹⁴¹ “Christ” “names this transformation for the church.” Ibid. p. 2.

¹⁴² Ibid.

existed. If so, the special character of God's salvific action on man's behalf must also be contingent."¹⁴³ Thus theology has its own domain; that is, it must determine God's specific revelation to humankind. As humans, we "are concerned with the specific way that loving response is directed toward us in our own particular existential predicament."¹⁴⁴ This can only be revealed in contingent historical particularities.¹⁴⁵ This idea is further enhanced if we view Christology in a broader context. To Ford, "Christology must be placed in the context of possible intelligent life elsewhere in the universe."¹⁴⁶ To do this, then, is to interpret the Christ as that part of the creative Word which is specifically addressed to humanity. Thus in Christ God has not only become incarnate as human but also for humanity.¹⁴⁷ Therefore, only through a christological aim, or God's purpose in Christ, can we evolve beyond ourselves in the form of a new unity, the church. To Christians, this aim was realized in Jesus of Nazareth through his life, death, and resurrection.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Ibid., 54.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Donald K. McKim, What Christians Believe About The Bible (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), 109-110. Ford, 54.

¹⁴⁷ Ford, The Lure of God, 54.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 124

CHRISTOLOGICAL REVELATION

According to Ford, antecedent conditions are important since they direct the aims given in any situation. That which distinguishes Jesus from other holy men is the aim that he receives. For these aims are **specifically christological**. Christ-events should not be classified as primal achievements (Ford's term is optimal realization) but "as one particular species of human events characterized by the successful achievement of 'christological aims,' as yet unspecified as to content."¹⁴⁹ He writes, "Complete human response to the divine prompting may be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the Christ-event if we define such response in relative rather than absolute terms."¹⁵⁰ He assumes that there is an unmistakable difference between christological aims and ordinary divine aims. The realization of ordinary aims or primal achievements is necessary for Christ-events, though not in any primary sense, since total obedience is only a partial requisite for Christ-events. Christ-events can only be achieved if God, in his goodness, grants to the situation christological aims. So Christ-events are not judged by compliance with divine aims only but, also by the presentation of christological aims by the grace of God. Even though this is not an arbitrary act of God, still, not everyone can receive christological aims, for "christological aims depend upon the grace of God, and He bestows them on some and not on others."¹⁵¹ The acts of God can be effective only so far as they elicit concrete response. Only a full creaturely response reveals God's action in the world. Jesus was fully responsive, but this is only a general achievement and thus is not enough to make him the Christ. All situations have antecedent conditions. These antecedent conditions can be ordinary, special, or particularly special. The christological aims that God bestows upon Jesus can be identified by the particular antecedent conditions (God's address to humanity) within his aims.

Many process theologians have made the mistake of awarding specialness to Jesus on the merit of his realization of ideal aims. But as Griffin points out, and Ford to this extent agrees, they do not make sufficient

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 52.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

use of the belief that ideal aims can be intensified, which is a consistent Whiteheadian concept. Griffin proposes that Jesus received christological aims. Jesus actualized these aims for the entire creation.¹⁵² But Griffin errs according to Ford, since he neglects a third factor: “the contingent dimension of God’s personal relationship to the human situation.”¹⁵³

The Christ as Revelation

God is personal, and he has a contingent nature.¹⁵⁴ This nature is “revealed in the contingencies of his particular dealings with his creatures.”¹⁵⁵ Whereas his eternal, necessary nature, along with his general revelation, can be accessed by means of an adequate philosophy, his personal nature, special revelation, can thus be seen only through **historical disclosure**.¹⁵⁶ Since God is related to humanity, and since humanity is a contingent species,¹⁵⁷ the special character of his revelation must be contingent and open-ended.¹⁵⁸ Therefore, special revelation has a different subject matter from general revelation. Only special revelation, Ford maintains, can tell us “what God is like for us.”¹⁵⁹

Christ is a life-giving spirit. Thus the actions of the church “are animated and directed by the life-giving spirit of the last Adam, that man who stands in the threshold of a new emergent reality, the body of Christ.”¹⁶⁰ “This body here and now is composed of many human members, of flesh and blood, but it is a

¹⁵² Ibid., 53. Griffin, *A Process Christology*, 220.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 53

¹⁵⁴ Ford maintains that God is active receptivity; He (God) can be further enriched by the world. Lewis S. Ford, “Christ as the Mutual Transformation of God and Jesus,” p. 42.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 52. Events can be different; God’s experience of such an event must be contingent. Ford, “Evangelical Appraisals to Process Theism,” p. 152.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 54.

¹⁵⁷ Humanity can be extinct on earth, and other peoples can take our place. Ford, “Evangelical Appraisals to Process Theism,” p. 155.

¹⁵⁸ There is an area called Divine contingency and philosophy cannot enter into that domain. Ford, “Evangelical Appraisals to Process Theism,” p. 152.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 54.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

spiritual body because it is animated by the spirit of Christ.”¹⁶¹ The church “forms a living organism, a biological phenomenon which we conceive to be the next stage in the emergent evolution of the world, and the incarnation of the divine Word.”¹⁶² For the “concrete character of the creative Word must be found in the specific way in which it addresses each species beyond itself.”¹⁶³ Thus, he explains, “God’s purposes in Christ are not merely to manifest his love to all mankind (though it intends that as well), but to establish a new organic unity transcending human fragментарiness.”¹⁶⁴

The body of Christ (the church) is a particular stage in the emergent evolution of the world in a subjective sense. From an objective standpoint, the body of Christ is an incarnation of the Creative Word. The Creative Word embodies the Logos but it has its own concrete character which can be found in the particular way it addresses a species. Christ, as the Last Adam, is the final cause of the spiritual body, according to Ford.

Revelation and Divine Sovereignty

Jesus does believe that God’s kingdom is here and does share in the idea of a future coming of God as his Kingdom. But he “does not seek to explain why God’s kingdom has been delayed so long, for he was grasped by its immediacy.”¹⁶⁵ Truly, he believes in God’s coming as Jeremias points out: “Nowhere in the message of Jesus does the *basileia* (kingdom) denote the lasting reign of God over Israel in this age.”¹⁶⁶ But he (Jesus) “refused to speculate concerning the signs of the end that must be fulfilled.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 74.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Joachim Jeremias, New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus (New York: Schribner, 1971), 101-102, cited in Ford, The Lure of God, 33.

The special revelation of Jesus equates not his life and death as instrumental to the resurrection of Christ. Jesus speaks of the “present immediacy of this future kingdom, for this future reality exerted its power upon present actions.”¹⁶⁸ “The kingdom of God,” however, “in Jesus’ preaching cannot be interpreted as either simply future or simply present: recent New Testament scholarship has abundantly shown this.”¹⁶⁹

Jesus proclaimed: ‘the kingdom of God has come near,’¹⁷⁰ which means more than simply that it was expected to arrive some not too distant date in the future. Its nearness is also a qualitative measure of its power in affecting the present, a power which has already come to be felt. This future reality exerts its own power, more or less felt in varying degrees of nearness or distance. As this nearness was experienced in all of its power and poignancy, it was natural to assume, given the apocalyptic expectations of the day, that the long awaited kingdom of God was also chronologically near as well. But the experienced nearness of the kingdom may be independent of its chronological date, since it implies directly only to the power which the future exerts in the present.¹⁷¹

Ford would have us to believe that Jesus introduces the power of the present as past content to be actualized by an occasion. Also, he thinks Jesus realized that the power of the present brings in both the future (final causes) and the past (efficient causes) as past content.

Whitehead conceived of actuality as producing itself out of its own antecedent causes. Jesus was active by way of His own power in the form of his Christological aims. These aims were determined by His past causes (the Kingdom of God as power which has already come to be felt) since the content (Christological aims) was appropriated and unified by Jesus. To Ford, productive activity must be found in the present event, which has its own power.

Jesus’ present brings in both the past and the future. This is the case only if his Christological aims have two aspects. The subjective aspect is his power of the present (innermost subjectivity), and the objective

¹⁶⁸ Ford, The Lure of God, 33.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 34.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 34-35

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 43. There, Ford notes: Luke 10:11, if. Luke 10:5; Mark 1:15; Matthew 3:2; 4:7; 10:7.

aspect is the past content addressed to his present. Likewise, this power affects us as individualized men in the form of God's general purposes. Ford writes:

This proclamation is also coupled with a summons to repentance and faith. The power of this nearness does not affect us indifferently, shunting us to and fro in the manner of a physical force acting in terms of efficient causation. This power addresses our freedom, eliciting a response of acceptance or hostility. Its power lies precisely in its capacity to call forth our freedom, for it stir us to our very depths. The possibilities of repentance and faith require the fullest exercise of freedom, as they involve the transformation of our own selfhood.¹⁷²

A special act (or God's kingdom) involves a future reality and a present reality. The special revelation of Jesus Christ is not a present reality which vindicates God's general revelation, but must be taken as something which actualizes a new possibility. "The power of the future does not reside in some future actuality. This is a contradiction in terms if, in our freedom, we face a genuinely open future, such that nothing is actual until it has been actualized in the present."¹⁷³ In addition, "it is not as if this awaited actuality first exerts power when it becomes actual in the present."¹⁷⁴ Future actuality equals a real possibility. If the divine activity (power of the future) resides in Jesus' innermost subjectivity, then the divine power would be Jesus' subjectivity or the power of the past (Christological aims). But the divine activity (power of the future) must be interpreted as a pure possibility, not as a real possibility.

Jesus teaches that a special act (or God's kingdom) shows how a revelation can be effective in a present reality or past; even though he never equates the two. Ford writes, "To understand the power of God, then we must focus our attention on how the future can be effective in the present. It is precisely on this point that Jesus' teaching is liberating, for it portrays this future kingdom as it impinges upon the present."¹⁷⁵ A special act is not a hypostatic union of a present reality and a future inert possibility. Rather, it requires the potential revelatory act and the revelation of response. Ford maintains that:

¹⁷² Ford, The Lure of God.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 37.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

Both dimensions are crucial. If the kingdom is simply a present reality, then it is just one more actuality among others in our present world, mysteriously hidden from view. If the kingdom is simply future, then it exerts no power to which the present must respond, but remains merely an inert possibility we hope someday might be realized. It is the energizing of possibilities by divine appetite that constituted the power of the future in the present, the nearness of God's reign.¹⁷⁶

The life and teaching of Jesus is needed to actualize the power of God.¹⁷⁷ "By using the term 'kingdom of God,' with its indelible future orientation, however, Jesus implies that God's power is this power of the future, for it is this future reigning of God which is actualized in the present by means of this ministry of exorcism."¹⁷⁸ Ford's illustration of the exorcism of Jesus against Beelzebub is proof that God is the power of the future. However, God is not a sole agent that affects all things. We must account for the power of the present, future, and past. Straight forward apocalyptic hope is an idle act. God's activity is in Jesus as a present. This means that His activity can never become present but must remain future.

The Father begets the Son or Logos. Special revelation must now express the idea that Christ is an embodiment of the Logos as a result of the life and death of Jesus.¹⁷⁹ This must be so, for if the "kingdom of God were to become a present reality, it would no longer be future. Thus the reigning of God is forever, future, never capable of surrendering its futurity to present realization."¹⁸⁰

Jesus' death now becomes the vehicle for sending Christ. His death now allows the Logos to be fully effective to humanity. "Through Jesus' faithful response to the Father, His human activity became the vehicle for divine power of the future to be fully effective."¹⁸¹ Ford clearly adheres to the belief that

God's judgement takes place through the instrumentality of this world, but the consummation of the kingdom we long for must be an unambiguously divine event. For that very reason it cannot be a future event, as every event

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Magorie H. Suchocki, God Christ Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 96-97.

¹⁷⁸ Ford, The Lure of God, 37.

¹⁷⁹ Ford, The Lure of God, pp. 95-96.

¹⁸⁰ Ford, The Lure of God, 38.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 38.

in this temporal world requires the conjoint activity of both God and creatures. Our irreducible freedom, moreover, means that we finally determine, through our own present power, how effective God's future power will be.¹⁸²

We should look for the consummation of the Kingdom in the divine activity rather than in the christological aims given to Jesus. In those aims, God affects the world. In the divine activity addressed to humanity, the world affects God as a final cause.

God is not a future actuality. Rather, he is a non-temporal actuality whose presence is felt through the future. That is, the subjective aspect of God cannot be felt. Only his objective manifestation can be felt. In our case, this must be taken as contingent. Therefore, the ideals (God's presence, power) used to bring the actuality (the past) experienced by God (the present) in harmonious unity (the future) thereby become lures for actualization in the temporal world.

¹⁸² I *bid.*, 40.

JESUS CHRIST AS RESPONSE AND REVELATION

God's love is not absolute in its relativity, but rather in its integrity. "God's love is absolute in its integrity, invulnerable to any destruction, but this by no means implies any impassability to suffering, which is at the heart of the most profound love."¹⁸³ If God does not suffer, then His love or revelation in Christ is not dependent upon the death of Jesus. Thus, His love is something which is separated from our human experiences. However, we know, according to Ford, that God must work in union with his creatures. In order to understand this profound thought, we must elaborate for a moment on God's primordial nature.

In his primordial nature, God provides each occasion with lures. "The primordial nature is the source of all those possible ideals which can serve as the initial aim of occasions,"¹⁸⁴ Ford explains. Following Whitehead, Ford maintains that transcendence is a generic notion in that it applies to all creatures, even to God: "Such transcendence is possible only because of the incessant creative urge transforming every multiplicity as it arises into an actual unity."¹⁸⁵ All actual entities, including God, are creatures which share in the characteristic of transcendence.

God "transcends and is transcended in ways peculiar to Him."¹⁸⁶ That is, whereas the transcendence of a finite actual entity is relative, God's transcendence is absolute, since He can transcend "every actual entity as it arises by incorporating it into His being."¹⁸⁷ However, finite entities are also in a sense absolute in that they are transcended by other subsequent entities. God, though, is only "partially transcended by actual occasions, for they can only pretend those aims of God relevant to their particular world, leaving untouched those infinite reservoirs of possibility which are not yet (or no longer relevant) to the creative advance."¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 105.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 106.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 106. See Whitehead, Process and Reality, 143

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 106.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 106; Whitehead, Process and Reality, 31, 32.

God is pure presence, eternal to Himself, a non-temporal actuality who, as the envisagement of infinitude of all real possibilities, requires a past from the world to create a new future, transforming His possibilities to persuasive lures.

This non-temporal, primordial nature of God is ultimacy in its religious meaning. It is distinct from the metaphysical ultimacy, creativity. For, metaphysically, creativity requires two "instanations:" the creativity of God and the creativity of finite occasions. Both are necessary since "sheer creativity is utterly formless."¹⁸⁹ Creativity cannot determine primordial envisagement. Ford writes,

God is an accident of creativity because the particular character of the primordial envisagement is not determined by the essential nature of creativity. Creativity only requires that the many become one, but how they become one is the decision of that actuality in process of self-creation.¹⁹⁰

Thus, the world in which "God creates in creating himself" is "the infinite wealth of structured possibility which constitutes God's primordial nature."¹⁹¹

God's revelation in Jesus Christ is intelligible, and it can communicate his love to mankind, but only with relation to the life and death of Jesus as a response in his present to God's christological aims. Jesus' death is needed to show God's reconciliation and renewal of revelation to humanity as a contingent species. In response to Jesus' activity, God sends, through or by means of the resurrection, the Christ.

Given our understanding of the way God acts in cooperative union with his creatures, we cannot see the resurrection as a unilateral action of God. On the one hand, raising Jesus to himself cannot simply be a purely arbitrary decision of God's part, but one made in response to the intrinsic quality of Jesus' life, suffering, and death. He is the one most worthy to be praised, because the living purpose of Jesus concretely embodied God's own purpose for mankind.¹⁹²

He continues,

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 107

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid., 90.

Were any other person with a narrower outlook or sympathies raised up as the living source of aims to which we humans would be subordinate, we could find ourselves subject to a demonic totalitarianism destructive of the best possibilities inherent in us as separate individuals.¹⁹³

God's revelation in Christ must come by a response to the death of Jesus. Ford maintains that:

A risen Christ to whom we can subordinate ourselves in good conscience must be one whom to serve is perfect freedom. Jesus can become that risen Christ only because his living purpose fulfills and does not thwart our highest aims. On the other hand, the resurrection of the body of Christ also involves the transformation of individual men into willing members of that body, and this can only be effected through the atonement.¹⁹⁴

God was able to raise Jesus because his life embodied the divine activity. Thus, God's purposes to us as individual men are appropriate. If these purposes were not appropriate, then we could not have the atonement. As humans, we look for richer resources and higher aims in God's purposes, according to Ford. As individuals, we need to place our faith in such purposes. This allows us to become members in the body of Christ.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ As Relative to the Resurrection

The revelation of Jesus Christ is largely, though not entirely, dependent upon the action of Jesus. It also requires the revelation in Christ, which is identified with the successful realization of christological aims.¹⁹⁵

To Ford, the risen Christ is living but not perceptible. He is that dynamic personality who assured the early Christians that He was still alive among them. He cites Knox's contention that: "The two facts--he was known still and he was remembered--constitute together the miracle of the Resurrection; and neither is more important than the other."¹⁹⁶

Both the granting of the christological aim and its receptive realization required prior preparation. To be relevant and usefully significant, God's

¹⁹³ Ibid., 91.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 79

¹⁹⁶ John Knox, The Early Church and The Coming Great Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1955), 52-53 in Ford op. cit., 73.

particular purpose must be realizable under the existent conditions only permit meager results. In other circumstances the concrete realizations of God's preliminary aims may create the conditions for a further intensification of divine aim.¹⁹⁷

God's particular purpose was given to Israel since mankind as a whole failed to actualize it. Israel, as well as the small faithful remnant, failed also. Though they all (mankind, Israel, the remnant) failed to actualize his aim, they established the condition for Jesus to arrive and actualize God's purpose. When Jesus died, He became an efficient cause. His death allowed the Christ to come, according to Ford. He maintains that the early Christians experienced Christ in visions.

That is, the revelation in Jesus must bear a continuity with the Spirit of Christ. "The Spirit of Christ must have had its own distinctive personality, for they recognized that it bore unmistakable continuity with their master Jesus whom they remembered."¹⁹⁸

He denies the historic Christian viewpoint that Jesus was resurrected bodily from the dead. He replaces this idea with the concept of apostolic reports and apostolic resurrection appearances. Thus, the church's experience of Christ is a real possibility only if we take these reports to be efficient cause of the experience of Christ, and take the appearances to a pure possibility or final cause of Christ's resurrection.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ as Relative to the Cross

Jesus is not the re-presentation of Christ. Jesus becomes the Christ because his living purpose incarnates God's purpose for us. The death of Jesus overcomes sin so that we can receive the love God.¹⁹⁹ Williams writes that "the insight that the reconciliation which creates the new community comes by way of suffering. Jesus' suffering becomes the very word and speech of love finding bodily, historical expression and creating a new possibility of community."²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Ford, 75.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 77.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 22, 54.

²⁰⁰ Ford, The Lure of God, pp. 86-87.

God's revelation must be understood as possible only in conjunction with the atonement of Jesus. The revelatory act as found in Jesus' death is responsible for the actualization of God's gracious revelation of love to us. "Without atonement, therefore, the resurrection of Christ would not have been possible--for there would be no individual human beings capable of being transformed into members of that body."²⁰¹ The responsive act of Jesus has "inaugurated a process of reconciliation which continues its work of concretely exhibiting to us the love of God in the body of Christ's resurrection."²⁰²

Jesus does not show us that all history is redeemed. He reveals, according to Ford, that our redemption lies in his life and death along with the resurrection of Christ. Ford maintains that our redemption "is found not only in the assurance that our inacceptability is accepted, but that the evil inherent therein is transformed into lasting value, a good we can dimly appreciate."²⁰³ We are accepted on the basis that we place our faith in God's ability to give richer resources and higher aims. God responds to this trust by giving us peace -- assurance that he has felt our evil in consequent nature. This is so for Ford because he believes that God has a consequent nature. Some background information must be given concerning God's consequent nature because Ford's methodology calls for the world to be related to God as well as God to the world.

Ford follows Whitehead's belief that actual entities have two poles. These two poles are conceptual and physical prehensions. Moreover, God is also an actual entity, and thus He is no exception to this category.²⁰⁴ "Without these additional physical prehensions, God would have no experience of the world, whose plurality and finitude require temporality."²⁰⁵ But "the experiential evidence for the divine consequent

²⁰¹ Daniel Day Williams, The Spirit and the Forms of Love (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 184 as quoted in Ford op. cit., 90.

²⁰² Ford, op. cit., 92.

²⁰³ Ibid., 93.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 109,

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

nature is very subtle and tenuous.”²⁰⁶ Since any proof for God’s consequent nature is unsubstantial—at least to Whitehead, since he is interested only in necessary or generic features--then we cannot “directly apprehend his consequent nature, but become aware of its presence by the subtle, dynamic shifts in the divine aims directly accessible to us as God’s response to our actions.”²⁰⁷ Not only do we become aware of dynamic shifts in initial aims, but these can also redeem. He writes that:

The individual, momentary occasions of our life, with their particular, limited accomplishments, pass away, yet not before they are caught up and transformed in the divine life, informing and qualifying those initial aims which God then supplies our successive occasions. These new aims are not impervious to our past, but express God’s living response and encouragement to our faltering actions.²⁰⁸

Hence, “we are being born anew from above as we receive novel aims from God originating our subjectivity from moment to moment.”²⁰⁹ This thought is verified by the biblical command of the apostle John: “You must be born *anew*.” (italics are Ford’s). “It is God’s consequent experience of our lives which calls forth his dynamic provision of new aims for our lives, by which we have redemption.”²¹⁰

Ancient Israel was aware of God’s personal involvement, and it foresaw the Whiteheadian concept of God’s consequent and temporal nature, according to Ford. Yet, Ford further points out that “an idea of rejection through sin soon arose within Israel’s view of God as a righteous judge.”²¹¹ To this threat of rejection, however, the New Testament assures us that God will accept all the evil in the world into his being,

²⁰⁶ Divine relativity “includes a sympathetic feeling with the worldly beings, all of whom have feelings. Hence, it is not merely the content of God’s knowledge which is dependent, but God’s own emotional state. God enjoys our enjoyments, and suffers with our sufferings. This is the kind of responsiveness which is truly divine and belongs to the very nature of perfection. Cobb and Griffin, Process Theology, 48.

²⁰⁷ Ford, op. cit., 85.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 86.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

and transform it. This admittance of evil into God's being is expressed as divine suffering through the cross. That is, divine suffering can be summarized by the event of the crucifixion.²¹²

The potential revelation of Jesus' sacrificial life and death does not vindicate, for Ford, God's revelation in Christ; rather, his death reveals the temporary weakness of God.

In the hour of Jesus' deepest need, he could not feel the presence of God, because there were no redemptive possibilities that God could provide, no aims which could vouchsafe to him the infinite resourcefulness of the life in clothing his actions with resplendent meaning, sending him forth with renewed courage. For Jesus, there was only the cross and death. In his cross the weakness of god is revealed, as he stood by powerless to comfort his beloved. The worst of it was that God intimately experienced Jesus' awareness that this sustaining grace had suddenly abandoned Jesus, but he knew this abandonment, as Jesus knew it, in the depths of his being.²¹³

Our salvation must be grounded in not only the abandonment of God as seen in the death of Jesus, but also in our present response to the renewed revelation of God's gracious act in Christ, as displayed in His resurrection. Ford writes, "Thus the very act in which Jesus felt abandonment in his death enabled the emergence of the lure for resurrection in the near future."²¹⁴ He concludes, "In this transhuman body we need no longer fear abandonment of God in death, for even that can contribute to ongoing life. Jesus underwent the abandonment of God, so necessary for the emergence of the resurrected body, in order that we might be spared his experience."²¹⁵

The renewed life which is found in Christ must be grounded solely in the primordial nature of God in order to be a new possibility addressed to the human situation. The resurrected Christ's subjectivity is temporally emergent, yet the objective principle that he embodies relative to our need is grounded in the very fabric of the transcendent, primordial God."²¹⁶

²¹² Ibid., 92.

²¹³ Ibid., 94.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 95.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 96.

SUMMARY OF FORD

For Lewis Ford, God as di-polar has necessary and contingent aspects. He asserts that the necessary aspects can be known only through philosophy, and that contingent aspects can be revealed through scriptures as a history of God's dealing with humanity.

We can see, then, that God acts in general toward all creatures as the Logos. The term "divine persuasion," however, is a way to describe this action to humanity. God's action is not limited to humanity but must extend to all creatures. This is so because Ford makes a distinction between the Logos and the creative word. The creative word addressed to us is the Christ. But we could not receive the Christ as humans until the divine lure was heightened in the event of Jesus, Ford maintains. Christological aims, he says, were needed to allow Jesus to become the vehicle for God sending the Christ to us. Humanity was then taken to be the next step in an evolutionary process which allows Christology to be placed in the context of life on other planets. The achievement of Christ events led to the belief that Christ is a life-giving spirit, and that the death of Jesus allows the Christ to come. For Ford, this event can only take place if God can suffer as the glorification of Christ, and if God accepts individuals who are willing to be transformed into the body of Christ. The church is the body of Christ, animated by Christ himself.

In conclusion, God's revelation starts with a general address to all creatures and ends in an idea of revelation addressed to contingent creatures on other planets.

A CONCLUDING COMPARISON OF OGDEN AND FORD

Both Ogden and Ford believe that God acts in an original or general way relative to all creatures. However, Ford maintains that God has acted in Israel differently from the way he acts in other nations. To Ford, past circumstances played an important role in the specialness of Jesus. But Ogden maintains that God acts primordially in Jesus the same way he acts in all creatures.

David Griffin criticizes Ogden's idea of Jesus' specialness by pointing out the contradiction inherent to such a statement. Griffin states that Ogden has made it impossible to state that Jesus is special, and doubly impossible for him to be decisive. Griffin insists that Jesus could not be special without God's acting some way different in Israel as well as in Jesus. He goes on to introduce his idea of christological aims which accounts for the specialness of Jesus.²¹⁷

Ford follows Griffin's line of reason relative to christological aims, but he maintains that Griffin is mistaken by asserting that Jesus actualized God's aim for the entire creation. Ford would have us to believe God made two prior attempts to have humanity actualize its specific purpose. God addressed Israel as a whole and the small, faithful remnant after the exile. Both failed to actualize God's specific purpose fully for humanity; nonetheless, they (Israel and Israel's remnant) set the stage for Jesus. That is, God was able to **intensify** his aims for Jesus through the past response of Israel and Israel's remnant. Jesus actualized his ordinary aims to a high degree. This allowed God to send him christological aims. The past content (Israel and its remnant) and Jesus' subjective aim (the presupposition of God's address through him to humanity) make his aims different in kind from other men. Thus, for Ford, Jesus is special because he actualized God's aim to a high degree, and he is supreme revelation because the aims he received were different in kind. Therefore, Jesus can be seen as supreme without any supernatural elements. Jesus actualized his aims to a high degree; this allowed him to be seen as special. But other men of religious leaders, like Buddha, may have actualized God's aims for them to a high degree. However, Jesus' aims were not simply special, but rather the past content of his aims made his aims particularly special. The idea of the past attached to the new

²¹⁷ David R. Griffin, A Process Christology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973), p. 218.

is necessary for Ford if we categorize events into three levels. These levels are general acts, special acts, and particularly special acts. Without past content, we cannot determine the various kinds of events. Israel and the remnant²¹⁸ were factors in determining the decisiveness of Jesus.

Ogden arrives at the specialness of Jesus from a standpoint of renewal. All men receive the same aims, so the type of aims of a man is not considered by Ogden in determining the specialness of an act. An act is special for Ogden if it re-presents God's characteristic activity as Creator and Redeemer. The idea of a special act does not lose all of its universality. That is, any man can re-present God's action. However, when someone else interprets this event as re-presenting God's action, then it can become a special act. So, if someone appropriately re-presents God's action and some one receives this action as God's action, then the act becomes a decisive act of God. Since Jesus actualized God's aims to a high degree and the disciples interpreted him as doing so, he has become a decisive act. Ogden is not interested in various kinds of aims, i.e., christological aims. He is concerned with the various kinds of religions. For the disciples and Christianity, Jesus can become a decisive act by re-presenting God's love to those who are a part of the Christian tradition. Jesus does not reveal anything new as a revelation to them since every man already has what Jesus objectifies. However, since he reveals God's love to them personally, what he reveals is something new, as an occurrence in their history of God's love. Thus, Ogden's way around the dilemma is to conceive of various traditions instead of various kinds of aims. To him, revelation can be new in that it reveals God's love appropriately to specific traditions and personally to a person who is a part of that tradition.

Both Ogden and Ford escape the dilemma of presenting something new in a system that requires all events to be related instantiations of creativity by appealing to the idea that there are other Christs besides Jesus. Ogden feels that there can be other Christs relative to various traditions,²¹⁹ whereas Ford maintains that

²¹⁸ Ford, "Christ as the Mutual Transformation of God and Jesus", p. 1.

²¹⁹ Ogden, On Revelation, p. 283.

there can be other Christs relative to other planets.²²⁰ This type of thinking leads both Ogden and Ford to a view of the resurrection of Christ as something subjective²¹⁸²¹ rather than objective.

When dealing with Jesus and the resurrection, Ogden starts with the Apostolic witness, which is really a future event if we compare it in time to the event of Jesus, which is ever present. Prior to the event of Jesus was the past event of God's original revelation. Bultmann maintained that man's authentic existence was lost in the past and must be restored by the present event of Jesus. Of course, Ogden rejects Bultmann's teaching because man cannot lose his authentic existence, according to his system. So the role of Jesus is simply to objectify God's original revelation. Ogden states that the Jesus behind the Apostolic witness cannot be a past historical future.²¹⁹ Rather, the event of Jesus is the present event of Jesus constitutive of and constituted by the Apostolic witness.²²⁰ If Jesus is the present event, then he must presuppose the Apostolic witness. Also, if Jesus is human, according to Ogden's existentialist interpretation, then he is the present event addressed to me. In either case, the Resurrection of Jesus must be subjective because the resurrection is not a historical happening after the life and death of Jesus.²²¹ This may be the New Testament's idea of resurrection, but it must be taken strictly as mythology. That which occurs after the life and death of Jesus is the Apostolic Witness;²²² that which occurred prior to the present event of Jesus is God's original revelation. An objective resurrection would cancel the need for the Apostolic witness. Only a subjective resurrection

²²⁰ Ford, *The Lure of God*, p. 74.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 73, 79.

²¹⁹ Ogden, Unpublished lecture, "On Christ," p. 5.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ Carl E. Bratten paraphrases Rudolph Bultmann's idea of resurrection as an event that (1) did not happen in the physical world; (2) and that the resurrection is not an event of past history. Ogden follows Bultmann's idea of resurrection. But to the disciples and early Christians, God intervened supernaturally within history in a special way relative to the resurrection -- "Christian Theism is Resurrection Theism., Carl E. Bratten, in History and Hermeneutics (Philadelphia, Westminster, 1996) pp. 82-83; A.M. Ransey, The Resurrection of Christ (London: B6s, 1995), pp. 7-8. Also, see Daniel Fuller, Easter Faith and History (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 195.

²²² William G. Doty points out the fact that it is possible that Jesus did have the intention of formulating his sayings for transmission. Moreover, R. T. France asserts that the disciples were concerned with preserving the truth. William G. Doty, "The Discipline and Literature of New Testament form Criticism," *Anglican Theological Review* 51 (1969), p. 304.

would be in line in the Apostolic witness since the Apostolic witness bears witness to the resurrection as God's testimony.

A CONCLUDING EVALUATION OF OGDEN AND FORD

God, The World, and Past Events

The idea of an infallible Word must begin with a personal God, “creating, speaking, taking counsel within the Trinity of Divine Persons.”²²³ This requires an infinite “particular Power” that can produce “word symbols” understandable by finite men. The key to understanding such a “particular Power” is not just his infinity but also his personhood. The Genesis record maintains the plurality of persons (not gods) who are the ground of our own human personhood. That is, human personhood is derivative to a personal God who created us in his own image. He has bestowed on us finite and communicable attributes which are not “delusions in an impersonal universe.”²²⁴ As stated earlier, the God of the Bible is consistent with a designed universe, one in which He was free to create.²²⁵ In like manner, human personhood with its ability to love and communicate is consistent with the God of the Bible. The God who designed and created the universe is the same God who created us in his own image. This God, according to Scripture, is triune in personhood, and is the sufficient reason²²⁶ for both human persons and his universe. Thus, the traditional doctrine of creation tells us that the universe and personhood is neither unreal nor divine.²²⁷

In order to give an appropriate understanding of revelation, we must utilize three basic facts of historic Christianity. These facts are (1) the universe was created by a self-existent God and has a finite beginning; (2) the God who created the world revealed himself to us in propositional form as triune, and (3) this triune God reveals himself in both a general, natural way and a special, supernatural way.

²²³ Brown, Tensions in Contemporary Theology, pp. 461-62.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 462.

²²⁵ Norman Geisler points out that Ogden makes a category mistake when he claims that a necessary being must necessarily create. Norman Geisler, “Process Theology” in Tensions in Contemporary Theology, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and Alan J. Johnson (Chicago: Moody, 1976), p. 274.

²²⁶ Isaiah 40:28; Nash, The Concept of God, p. 32. Nash points out that the things that exist within the consequent nature of God require a sufficient reason for their existence, even if the world itself is eternal.

²²⁷ Dan Story, Defending Your Faith: How to Answer the Tough Questions (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992), pp. 191, 202-203.

Process theology challenges those basic facts by maintaining that universe does not have a finite beginning, nor is God a trinity or tri-unity of persons. Rather, God can be interpreted as a tri-unity of principles. Also, it propounds the idea that God can act in a general, natural way, but not in a special, supernatural way.

Both Ogden and Ford maintain that general and special revelation can be interpreted adequately along process lines. But it is one thing to say that revelation can be interpreted in terms of process theology, it is another thing to claim that one's interpretation of revelation is appropriate to the meaning of revelation as presented in Scripture, a claim that both make relative to their theories of revelation.

First, scripture claims that the universe had a beginning. But, before we look at the scriptural evidence, we must examine the claim that the universe does not have a beginning from a process standpoint.

Process theology upholds the belief that every act of temporal self-creation is based on past efficient causes. This means that process theologians can maintain that time has always existed since there can be times before any time we can specify. Therefore, they insist that the "world has always existed in some form or other, since time and the world could not exist apart from each other."²²⁸

William Lane Craig points out that this belief is in line with the "Greek view of the eternity of matter."²²⁹ Thus, he argues that the world's past according to process thought must be absolutely infinite. Therefore, he critiques process thought by arguing that no infinite series can be completed in our present since the present presupposes the completeness of its past. That is, it is impossible for an infinite series to be actual as complete without having both a beginning and an ending.²³⁰ But, an infinite series does not have a beginning and an ending. Thus, the past cannot be absolutely infinite. Ford, however, challenges Craig's assertion by stating that "no matter what past event we specify as the beginning of our series,

²²⁸ Lewis S. Ford, "Evangelical Appraisals of Process Theism," p. 157.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

however remote it may be, it can be only finitely distant from our present.”²³¹ Ford’s point is that there can be various beginnings, all presupposing prior events. This would mean that “the matter out of which present events create themselves are past events. . . .”²³² But his answer to Craig leads to a greater problem, the existence of past events as efficient causes. The idea of past events is based on the assumption that “everything is either an actual entity that concretely exists in the world or one of the eternal potentialities existing in the primordial nature of God.”²³³ Ronald Nash points out that this “dualism excludes anything that can serve as a sufficient reason for the existence of any actual entity.”²³⁴ Not even the process standard answer of creativity can help. If Ford appeals to creativity to explain the dualism that past events need, then creativity must be taken as something that exists outside the world and as something above God. That is, creativity cannot be “a real ground in a Whiteheadian system; only actual entities are real causes.”²³⁵ Craig’s thesis that the universe has a beginning is not only logical but also biblical. It is illogical to assume with Ford and Ogden the belief that past events are the matter from which present events create themselves.

The World and Infinite Potentials

Traditional thought points out many inconsistencies relative to process theology. There are two inconsistencies that plague the process concept of revelation, however.

First, process theology cannot successfully explain how some of God’s infinite possibilities become actual. Geisler writes, that “anything passing from potentiality to actuality, from what is not to what is, depends on some actuality to ground it. Nothing does not produce something; possibilities to exist do not materialize on their own.”²³⁶ Ogden’s concept of revelation depends upon this process premise. He holds

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ronald H. Nash, The Concept of God: An Exploration of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God, p.86.

²³⁵ Ibid., p. 34.

²³⁶ Norman Geisler, Christian Apologetics (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), pp. 208-9.

that what Jesus re-presents is an actual general truth. In like fashion, Ford insists that Jesus actualized christological aims from God. Ford would have us to believe that these aims are actual. But, there is nothing in process theology that can substantiate this thought. This is an issue that is neglected by both Ogden and Ford. Both assume that some of God's infinite possibilities are actual. Without this premise, neither can maintain that the revelation is special in some sense. If God's infinite possibilities are only potentials, as stated by Geisler, then Ogden cannot say that anyone is confronted with a real possibility that is **actually** re-presented to them as historical event through Jesus; and Ford cannot maintain that Jesus was **actually** transformed by God.

The World and Finite Being

Second, process theology fails to give a sufficient reason for the origin of particular events. Ogden says that Jesus re-presents God; and, Ford avers that Jesus transforms God. However, neither gives an account for the origin or existence of Jesus. In typical process fashion, it is assumed that Jesus existed because it is possible for him not to exist, or because of "creativity." Ogden and Ford are aware of the contingency of particular events within the world; however, both do not address the question of how particular events arise in order to work either with or without God in becoming special acts. O'Donell points out that "process theology denies any being or ground save God alone which is the necessary ground of whatever is or is even possible."²³⁷ Thus, "for any event given actual world of creatures, that world was itself created 'out of nothing' in the sense that there once was when it was not."²³⁸ Therefore, "any given world then is a co-creation."²³⁹ A particular event "creates itself out of the data of its world with the help of God's initial which are the source novelty."²⁴⁰ God cannot be seen, however, as the Creator of the particular event's existence. It is illogical to assume that some creature can exist without

²³⁷ John J. O'Donell, Freedom and Revelation (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), pp.89-90.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

God, yet is dependent upon Him for its co-creation. Ogden and Ford would have us to believe that Jesus was dependent upon God for his co-creation while at the same time they would have us to believe that the existence of Jesus is a given or an instance of creativity.

In conclusion, the concept of revelation relative to Ogden and Ford is illogical. They both propound that there is no beginning to the temporal process and that the world never had a beginning in time. There was never a time when God was without some world. "Because of panentheism"²⁴¹ unmitigated stress upon the change and process that characterizes everything, including God, it is difficult to see how the God of process thought can retain any identity."²⁴¹ Traditionalists point out that in order for God's revelation to human persons to be special or decisive, there must be something that can ground His existence. Ronald Nash says, what "reason then have Christians today to believe that the God they worship is the *same* God worshipped by Moses and revealed by Jesus Christ?"²⁴² Even the appeal to Sabellianism or Modalism (both maintain that God is abstract but can manifest Himself in various modes) cannot do justice to this claim. Moreover, human persons need some type of ground for their existence. A particular event cannot simply spring up from anywhere. Process theology as a system basically says that nothing can be special because of natural processes, and if something could be special it could not remain special since everything changes. Process theism is illogical and will forever remain so.

²⁴¹ Nash, The Concept of God, p. 35.

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