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Process Theology

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and doctrines of the Priscillianists smacked of Manichaeism* and sorcery. Matters came to a head when these charges were brought against Priscillian and some associates before the Emperor Maximus at Trier in 385. This led to their execution – the first and almost only occasion in antiquity when a heretic suffered this fate at the hand of a civil ruler. At the time the greatest indignation was reserved for those bishops who had pressed capital charges.

After these executions there was a temporary reaction in favour of Priscillian, who in some quarters was regarded as a martyr.* A schism* was threatened within the Spanish church, but this was avoided by vigorous action from the Council of Toledo in 400. At a popular level Priscillianism continued to exercise some influence right up to the 6th century.

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PROCESS THEOLOGY is the theological system that has been developed on the basis of the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne. The name itself derives from the central tenet of both of these philosophers that reality is a process of becoming, not a static universe of objects. From this, a unique concept of both God and man is derived, and from that in turn a complete theology.

Whitehead (1861–1947) began, in 1925, a series of publications which culminated in *Process and Reality* (1929). Here he developed an original metaphysical* system based on the primacy of events. The notion of events combines into one the previously separated notions of space, time and matter, as indicated by Einstein's physics. These events (Whitehead called them actual occasions) are the atoms of the cosmos. Each atom is a point in the process, which takes from the past and incorporates new possibilities into a new event which, in turn, contributes to the future. The highest principle in this process is that of creativity. It continuously brings about novelty in a creative advance that maximizes good.

Hartshorne (b. 1897), beginning with several major works in the 1940s, has

developed a complete process philosophical theology, detailing especially a full concept of God.

These views have seen extensive elaboration in succeeding decades by theologians and philosophers such as John Cobb (b. 1925), David R. Griffin (b. 1939), Schubert Ogden (b. 1928), Daniel Day Williams (1910–73) and Lewis Ford (b. 1933) in the United States and Norman Pittenger (b. 1905) in England, to name just a few.

Most process theology is rooted in process theism.* God, according to Whitehead, is the primary example of metaphysical truths as well as the one who supplies initial direction to every event. Hence neither the general nature of reality nor the free actions of history* are comprehensible apart from him.

The process view of God has been described as panentheism.* It differs from theism in identifying God and the universe, but it differs also from pantheism* in seeing God as more than, or existing beyond, the universe. Hartshorne and Ogden use the analogy of a person's relation to his body. I am my body, but I am more than it.

In Whitehead and Hartshorne, God's existence is necessitated by two different factors which produced a dipolar concept. God in his 'primordial', eternal, absolute nature as mind contributes the novel aims or possibilities to each succeeding event. God in his 'consequent' changing and growing nature physically experiences the process, knowing and loving it. But experiencing involves a real relation or union, hence the cosmic process is God.

For Whitehead God is conceived of as himself a single event who in one act is comprehending the whole process. More recently, John Cobb and others have developed a view of God as being like a human person, that is, a series of comprehending events, identified by common characteristics which continue in the transition.

The doctrine of Christ (see Christology*) has presented process theologians with a difficult problem. Every event in history is God's activity and being inserting itself. In this sense every occasion is incarnation,* and hence no single event can be so exclusively. Yet it remains true that God cannot determine events. As a result, no event is only God's action, and therefore the deity of Christ is impossible in any strict sense.

Process Christologies, as in David Griffin,

Norman Pittenger and Lewis Ford, generally attempt to show that Christ's life was God's in the sense that it was lived in complete obedience, that is, that Christ most perfectly followed the 'lure' of God. Others have done so to a high degree, but in Christ obedience was so complete that a whole new subjectivity, a way of human living, is inaugurated.

The result of the life and death of Christ is the emergence of a new kind of community, the church.* This is the meaning of resurrection:* the body of Christ is born. For Ford this is seen as a major step in human evolution. Man is now radically different.

Add to this the view that the Holy Spirit* is to be understood as God's contribution of initial aims, and we see that process theology is unitarian,* not Trinitarian.

The twofold character of all events as both incarnational and autonomous also defines the process theologian's view of revelation.* Because all events, including human actions, are given their initial design by God, they are each a revelation of his character. As a result the traditional distinction between general and special revelation breaks down. There is only special revelation; direct, intentional and conscious acts of God. But every event has this quality.

On the other hand, because every event is self-determined in its actuality, God cannot ensure that any revelation truly represents him. The future is never known, always free and open. Until it decides itself, it has no reality and cannot be predicted, even by God. Consequently, revelation could never be inerrant. Some expressions will be more characteristic than others, but none can be guaranteed true.

Hermeneutics* is seen as an attempt to retrace the revelational process to discover God's original 'lure'. Thus, it has both objective and subjective components, and is possible only in the interaction of the reader.

The general features of process philosophy imply a view of man that is very close, if not identical, to that of Heidegger, Bultmann* and other existentialists.* Ogden has been the principal figure in developing this point. A person is a series of separate events. Each point is autonomous not only in relation to all others in the series but also to God. It is self-determinative. Thus, it is also dependent on its own existential decision. I am what I am now deciding to be.

As a result, the redemptive activity of God consists in his willingness to accept past evil, transform it into good and continue to lure each individual toward a self-authenticating acceptance of true value. A person's salvation consists in his recognition of disloyalty to communality (Ford, Cobb and Griffin) and his willing acceptance of God's lure to be a member of the body of Christ.

The process-God's ability to preserve each event as an 'eternal object' adds an eschatological* dimension to the theological system. Not only does God's continuing knowledge preserve the reality (in a subjective sense) of each occasion, but his use of the past in presenting new possibilities to the future also gives meaning to former events. Ogden and others have used this concept in Whitehead as a way of spelling out the biblical idea of eternal life and heaven. Nothing is forgotten to the love of God, all is preserved and continues to affect the future meaningfully. It should be noted, however, that this is not conscious personal continuance, and also that it is universal in application.

Ford, Cobb and others have done much to develop a general eschatology as well. It follows from their view of the church as the emergence of a higher state of human evolution (see Creation*). This understanding permits us to look forward to a time when God's aims will finally overcome the individual evil events, and bring about a true community of love and peace. Hartshorne roots this in the biblical view of love as true union.

There is among process theologians wide diversity of concern to preserve a biblical Christianity. Some, like Lewis Ford and many Roman Catholics, indicate a strong desire to remain scriptural, but most are concerned only to remain within a broadly understood Christian tradition. Some, like Hartshorne, are impressed with many process-like insights in Buddhism* and other religions and will explicitly reject some Christian ideas in their favour. Hence an evangelical response to process theology is bound to be varied.

In general, however, several major flaws can be indicated. First, its general metaphysics negates the biblical view of creation* and providence* with its radical distinction between infinite creator and finite cosmos. Some, like Hartshorne, have argued that the traditional view is not Hebrew but a Greek

addition and to be rejected. Others have attempted to modify Whitehead to allow for the distinction.

Second, its universal view of incarnation has so far prevented any ontological, rather than functional, concept of the deity of Christ. Likewise, it prevents any judicial or truly redemptive view of salvation. Finally, the hermeneutic of process theology eliminates any concept of inerrancy (see Infallibility*). God cannot bring about such an event, neither could words have purely objective meaning (Hartshorne).

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PROCESSION (OF HOLY SPIRIT), see **HOLY SPIRIT**; **TRINITY**.

PROGRESS, IDEA OF. The idea most characteristic of 19th-century thinking was that of progress. There were many reasons for this. Britain's industrial revolution became the pattern for rapid economic growth and social development throughout the West. Scientific discovery and its application in such practical developments as techniques of mass production and advances in public health helped generate an optimistic and forward-looking cast of mind, which was fostered by the spread of civilization by the European empires and across the continent of North America. At the same time, the wide influence of Hegel's* dialectical rationalism provided the seed-bed in which was sown the theory of evolution (see Creation*).

The idea of evolutionary progress as the

explanatory hypothesis of reality was therefore antecedent to the development of Darwin's theory of evolution (itself not the first scientific theory of its kind). But Darwinism seemed to provide a scientific basis for the philosophical ideas which were already popular, and the use of biological evolution as the key to all historical development reached its high-water mark in the extensive writings of Herbert Spencer (1820–1903). It was typical of the mind-set of the mid-19th century that his scientific hypothesis should be made the basis for general philosophical constructions. Scarcely any thinker, Christian or not, avoided being influenced by the idea of evolutionary progress, in which the development of human society and the moral development of man were seen as continuous and essentially analogous with the supposed upward progress of biological evolution.

More recently, the Jesuit anthropologist Teilhard de Chardin* has attempted a full-blooded marriage of Darwinism and the Christian view of man and redemption. Spencer's later contemporary Henry Drummond sought in popular evangelical terms to do something similar in his *Ascent of Man* (1894).

An immediate implication of this way of thinking was found in the writing of history, in which an evolutionary progress was traced, and since the Christian Bible is largely an historical account there were dramatic repercussions for the way in which the Scriptures were assessed. A classic instance is William Robertson Smith's *Religion of the Semites* (1889), which attempts to find revelation in a naturalistic reading of history. It was of course not new for a naturalistic explanation to be given to the biblical history, since from the first days of the church those who were sceptical of its claims had their own way of reading its Scriptures. Yet such was the absorption with evolutionary progress that in the mid- and later 19th century the church itself began to adopt such a reading of its canonical Scriptures.

The Bible does not speak of man's history as an evolutionary progress. It tells of an original perfection from which man has fallen (see Fall*), and the story which follows is that of failed attempts to set matters right (Babel, flood, exile), with a constant regress on the part of man. Progress comes only from the side of God. The idea of a natural evol-

utionary progress is therefore the precise antithesis of the biblical picture of man and his religion, so the attempt thus to re-interpret the biblical history has to adopt the violent methods of Procrustes, and subordinate the data to the theory. This single fact explains in large measure the subsequent history of OT scholarship, which despite later renunciation of an evolutionary paradigm* is still undergirded by the inversion of the order of the law and the prophets which the theory required (since prophetic religion was held to be more simple and therefore earlier).

More recent social developments, beginning with the First World War and coming to a head in the nuclear threat, have dealt a death-blow to essentially progressive views of man, and returned ideas of evolution to the laboratory where they may or may not prove fit to survive. Man's economic and technological progress have been shown to be tenuous and by no means inevitable, and question-marks put against the claim that he has advanced morally since his earliest days. Redemption, far from being a product of evolution, can only be by revolution in man's continually regressive moral and spiritual story. The only true idea of progress is that of the progress of God in salvation-history.*

See also: **BIBLICAL CRITICISM**.

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PROOFS OF GOD'S EXISTENCE, see **NATURAL THEOLOGY**.

PROPHECY, THEOLOGY OF. Prophecy may be defined as (1) a way of knowing truth; and as such, may be compared and contrasted with philosophy. In its biblical manifestation it forms a part of (2) the theology of the Holy Spirit* and is represented as (3) one mode of the divine revelation* of God's truth or, in a broader sense, the totality of that revelation. Prophecy may be expressed in (4) a variety of literary forms and in (5) both canonical and non-canonical contexts. Each part of this definition may be expanded as follows.

1. Like philosophy, prophecy purports to

offer truth about God, man and the world, and its concerns may also be framed within well-known philosophical categories: What is the real? How do we know truth? How shall we act? Unlike philosophy, its starting-point is God and its source of knowledge is divine revelation – truth received, rather than truth achieved by autonomous human reason or experience. Thus, prophecy presupposes a transcendent world-view; that is, a creator and a spirit world, realities that are separate from but nonetheless impinge upon and communicate with the natural creation, specifically, with man. Prophecy is the mode and the content, and the prophet the human agent of that communication.

Prophecy not only represents a distinctive approach to truth but also, in the commentary on Scripture in 1 Cor 1:18–3:20, is given an exclusive claim to it. There Paul denies that autonomous human reason is a valid alternative way to truth, and his indictment against the wisdom of the Greeks must, in the context, have included philosophical thought (Godet; cf. *sophia*, 'wisdom', in 1 Cor.1:19–21; 1 Cor. 2:11–12). By this a redemptive natural revelation or insight is excluded (cf. O. Weber, Barth*).

2. Prophecy has its source in the 'Spirit of God.' This is clear in the NT where it is represented as the gift or act of the Spirit (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:10; cf. 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:8; 1 Thes. 5:19f.) and the prophet is identified as 'a man of the Spirit' (*pneumatikos* = 1 Cor. 14:37; cf. Hos. 9:7). But it is also true of prophecy in the OT (1 Sam. 19:20; 2 Ki. 2:15; 2 Ch. 15:1; Ne. 9:30; Mi. 3:8; cf. 2 Pet 1:20f.), even if in some books the role of the Spirit is lacking, unstressed or undifferentiated from that of Yahweh (Lindblom, *Prophecy*). The hope of Moses (Nu. 11:16, 29; cf. Lk. 10:1) that 'all the Lord's people [might be] prophets' and the prophecy of Joel (2:28) that 'God will pour out his Spirit on all flesh' find their specific import in the prophecy of the Baptist (Mt. 3:11) and their fulfilment in the post-resurrection church (Acts 2:16, 33).

3. The varieties of divine revelation are described in Je. 18:18 as 'the law . . . from the priest, counsel from the wise [and] the word from the prophet' (cf. Is. 28:7; 29:10, 14). While prophets might live together in communities or guilds (2 Ki. 2:3ff.; 6:1), others were attached to the temple and some