

UNIT 6: HOPE AND PROCESS THOUGHT

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This paper seeks to establish the main tenets of process theology in a way that demonstrates its inherent hopefulness. Such hopefulness will arise from an understanding of the human condition which highlights its attraction towards goodness as well as the relationship between God and humankind. However, it ultimately concerns the eventual and eternal fate of men and women (if not also the universe).

Process theology understands the world to be in a constant state of change and evolution. There is nothing about nature that is inert, and this can be seen in the everyday experience of the world. In short, the world is continuously moving and developing. It is almost as if an incomplete creation is being guided to its perfect, completed state by its Creator, who is perfect and complete in every way. People can influence this development largely by changing and adapting to different situations. Thus the world we experience is far from being a 'finished and settled system composed of discrete entities that are inert, changeless, static'.¹ Instead it is an unfinished and undeveloped habitation that is prone to sudden and far-reaching change as a result of either human action or natural change.

Throughout this process, God is the immutable entity who is continuously active in the world, presiding over the change that naturally occurs and influencing people to drive this change forward in a way that is a force for good. Cobb and Griffin state that 'the contrary notion that what is actual or fully real is beyond change leads to a devaluation of life in the world'.² The reason for this is that such a notion assumes a lack of capacity within human beings to recognise their surroundings and make conscious decisions to adapt to their environment. If people do not believe that it is possible to engage with the world and with the 'fully real', then they will withdraw from it. However, recognition of the world and the 'fully real' will encourage and motivate them to desire change for the good. Consequently, one of the basic precepts of process thought is the importance of creativity as the 'ultimate force or process in the world',³ as the 'drive toward the new and the next'⁴ keeps the world from falling into chaos. Life then becomes immediate, vital and important. Thus the initial grains of a hopeful theology have

¹ Norman Pittenger, *Process Thought and Christian Faith* (London: Nisbet, 1968), p. 11.

² John Cobb and David Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Belfast: Christian Journals, 1976), p. 14.

³ Jay McDaniel and Donna Bowman (eds), *Handbook of Process Theology* (Boston, MA: Chalice Press, 2006), p. 6.

⁴ Ibid.

been revealed in that in process thought, there is always something that can be worked *for*.

Primary Tenets of Process Thought

Process theology views the world as a series of ‘occasions’, or a series of concrete, individual moments that blend into each other. Hence, any given object or living being retains its actuality in each given moment by also retaining a large proportion of its characteristics from the previous moment. Nevertheless, there will also be a number of minute changes in the constitution of the object that give it a different identity in each given moment, even if these identities are indistinguishable from each other. The process of becoming therefore involves ‘the realization of one particular state of being’⁵ that has emerged from an infinite number of possible states of being, and is formed through the interaction of each separate ‘occasion’.

For example, any human being may not appear to age over a given period of time if he or she is being examined constantly. However, if glanced at on two occasions only, which span ten years, then the differences will be obvious. This is because the changes from occasion to occasion are so small that they are imperceptible, and yet they are all significant, as each of them contributes to the process that results in the visible change over a ten year period. Technically speaking then, there is an infinite range of possibilities as to the state of being that any person or object can attain. In practice, however, a state of being that inherits the vast majority of the characteristics from the state of being immediately preceding it will be attained. Hence, ‘enduring objects are sequences of ... momentary actualities, each of which massively inherits the qualities of its predecessor’.⁶ Returning to the example above, the gradual development of a person going through the aging process follows a linear pattern. Each occasion within the process is therefore inherently and intricately related to the occasion immediately before and after it.

It is important to note that there is no individual entity that can exist without an immediate predecessor and successor, as it is the sequence of moments threaded together that forms the ever-changing process of life. In terms of time, then, ‘in no case is a concrete reality without a predecessor from which it has just emerged into being what it is and without a successor to whose form its present

⁵ David Pailin, *God and the Processes of Reality* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 54.

⁶ Ibid.

state will immediately and massively contribute as datum'.⁷ Thus, on each 'occasion', a large proportion of data from previous 'occasions' is inherited, and this provides identity and continuity to each living thing. Furthermore, each new occasion is also an occasion in itself, which means that change from the previous occasion, however minute, can be attained. This means that no living thing is forced to retain a constant identity, but simultaneously, no identities exist in a state of chaos that would disrupt the fabric of life on earth.

Process thinkers argue that every individual is subject to a series of potential influences and is constantly changing. In the same way that an array of elements, particles and forces interact with each other and influence gradual change in the physical appearance of any object, people's mental outlook and view of the world can change without them necessarily realising it. This is because process philosophy expounds the principle that at the centre of being alive is being in relation to everyone and everything. As a result of this, each person affects and is affected by the people to whom he or she relates. These effects and changes create a dynamic world that is constantly moving forward and that is controlled by the people within it. Due to the actions of others, however, it is impossible to be entirely in control of these changes, as human beings are induced to respond to the actions of others, as well as themselves inducing changes in the people who are affected by their actions.

Exploring process theology's belief about the advance of occasions has led to the discussion of the changes that take place in the 'self'. It may be difficult to conceive of the precise meaning of 'self'. According to process theology, this is because a false construct is being imposed onto reality so that it makes more sense and becomes something with which human beings are more able to deal. In actuality, there is no one 'self', as each individual self that develops out of the previous self is a concrete entity in its own right, despite the fact that a large proportion of data has been retained from the previous 'self'. Cobb and Griffin describe the human-created false construct of reality as 'serially-ordered time'.⁸ Every event, even the very smallest, is experienced as an event. As one event expires, the next immediately begins. This creates the illusion of a constant reality, when in fact each experience exists individually as a 'droplet' of time. The effect is that of watching images on a screen that are rapidly shown one after the other, and blend together to create the impression of flowing, smooth motion. Even though the present moment is always the most vital due to the fact that it constitutes the present reality, all events are important because they contribute to the changes that take place within us, and therefore to the process of world history as a whole. However, rather than being one continuous self, each human

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*, p. 15.

being is a succession of 'self-nows'. In other words, each of these present moments exists independently of each other, but they seem to exist as one continuous moment. Despite each experience being very closely related to both its predecessor and successor, even Charles Hartshorne, one of the foremost process thinkers, believed that 'each momentary self is a new actuality, however intimately related to its predecessors'.⁹ This continues the thinking of the pioneering process thinker Albert Whitehead, who saw every experience as an individual concrete entity because each one goes through an extremely short process called 'concrecence'. During this process, the event spends a short period of time 'becoming' and realising itself, before the event passes and the next one begins the process. The process of 'concrecence' is what enables experience, and also 'enjoyment' of every event. Whitehead takes each of these terms to mean the same thing. According to him, enjoyment of a particular entity, and therefore a particular 'concrecence', 'is what the actual entity is, in itself, for itself'.¹⁰ It is different to consciousness, as 'consciousness presupposes experience'¹¹ and not the other way around. In other words, human beings are only conscious of a small number of things that they are in fact experiencing.

The hope that emanates from such a philosophy rises from the fact that bad experiences are only to be seen as individual 'droplets' or events that merely form a small part of the greater whole. In the grand scheme of things, such droplets serve to influence future occasions in a positive way by acting as part of the data that will form them. There is some hope and comfort that each negative experience is like all other 'droplets', merely the start of a new experience and an opportunity to transform the negativity that has been created previously.

However, the problem is that the world does seem to be like this, and nor do our experiences within it. As a result of the apparent 'flowing' of one moment into another, a constant self-identity is created by the placing of emphasis on the aspects of the current 'occasions' being experienced that have been inherited from previous occasions. But men and women do not fully appreciate that this identity is merely an abstraction. As a result, people fail radically to change their actions from moment to moment because they do not recognise the potential that exists within every occasion to do so, even when doing so would drastically improve their lives. Instead, they preserve this identity, despite the fact that the identity does not exist outside the series of 'self-nows' that they experience.

Process thought is therefore a liberating philosophy that frees humankind from the constructs of its own making: 'The sense of kinship with all things, which has

⁹ Charles Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1962), p. 18.

¹⁰ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), p. 81.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

evidently characterised human experience at most times and places, is rationally supported'.¹² Process theology promotes inter-dependence over independence, which has been the default position over the previous few centuries as people seek individually to connect with the Creator or pursue the ideal of the autonomous individual. People seek to not only enjoy each moment of their existence, but also to include the enjoyments of others into their experience, which makes all experiences richer.

It is impossible to understate the importance of the *process of becoming* in all living things. Whitehead asserts that a thing's 'being is constituted by its becoming',¹³ suggesting that it is the fact that people are *becoming* something else that makes them what they are at any given moment. One is reminded of the famous saying of Heraclitus, 'You never step into the same river twice'; while it may look similar to the human eye, everything undergoes a constant series of complex changes. The constant and inter-dependent nature of existence involves what Whitehead refers to as 'prehension', which is the technical name that he gives to the constant absorption, at a sub-conscious level, of all past experiences into the present experience.

It has been established so far that 1) life consists of individual moments that appear to be one constant whole, but are in fact completely separate, if still influenced by each other in a linear way; 2) the world is dynamic because these individual moments are constantly inducing change in all human beings; 3) this change comes about through human action, as human beings affect each other; 4) the individual moments that life is made up of can be recognised as such, which destroys the barriers that people put up between themselves.

God

Having examined process thought's understanding of human interaction, the role of God in earthly 'occasions' will now be discussed.

It is not necessary to be a process theologian to see that the created world is full of unexpected activity, and people and living things have the ability to behave and act in unexpected ways. Process theologians themselves would argue that this is because creation is 'a directed movement in which novelty occurs',¹⁴ and in which God is consistently and constantly involved. This vision of God's activity is inspired by his love for the world. The true meaning of each event will be known at a future time when more light is shed on their relevance in the whole of human

¹² Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*, p. 18.

¹³ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, Vol. 1, 2.2, p. 31.

¹⁴ Pittenger, *Process Thought and Christian Faith*, p. 20.

history. However, for process theology, there is no guarantee that 'the human species will move forward. It cannot stand still, but in the face of its massive dangers it may decay or even destroy itself'.¹⁵ The contribution of each event could therefore be a contribution to humankind's ultimate demise. However, this will not be known until a future time. For process theologians, God is constantly revealing himself throughout history, and each moment holds the potential to head towards a better world, but all current actions and events will be justified only at the end of time.

It follows that there are an unlimited number of 'prehensions' (the absorption of past experience into the present), taking place within each living thing at any one time, and that all of them together form a person's 'concrecence'. Every occasion that is formed by these 'prehensions' lasts for such a short period of time that it cannot be measured. Alongside this, every entity is persuaded to act in a certain way by means of what process theology refers to as a 'subjective aim' that has been innately provided to them by God. Process thinkers argue that God's wish is for humankind to fulfil the purpose that he has set out for them, which is that of self-completion. The purpose of self-completion involves becoming the best people possible, devoid of selfishness and greed, and full of love and kindness for all others in the world. Humanity is to fulfil this purpose by God through methods of 'persuasion', as opposed to much more direct methods that command people to do his bidding. They are specifically persuaded by 'images of love, beauty and rational harmony'¹⁶ that exist within their pre-reflective experience, which they then strive to create. Throughout the processes of 'concrecence', process theologians believe that God is 'prehended' and human beings are attracted to this 'subjective aim', and have the choice of whether to follow or not.

As a result of this, process theologians argue that every decision that is made is intended to fulfil a future purpose. 'The system is first and foremost a new teleology, for it makes every activity, in its immediate occurrence, purposive'.¹⁷ This teleology is genuinely concerned with the final goal of creation rather than with short-term gain.¹⁸ In other words, people see the benefit of acting in accordance with the 'subjective aim' of self-completion in terms of an ideal final state for humanity which there is genuine hope of achieving. Each action performed in accordance with the subjective aim in the present brings this state one step closer, and it is therefore inherently desirable to do so, even if it is through extremely small actions.

¹⁵ Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*, p. 117.

¹⁶ Pailin, *God and the Processes of Reality*, p. 56.

¹⁷ Victor Lowe, 'Whitehead's Metaphysical System', in Brown, Reeves et al (eds, *Process Philosophy and Christian Thought* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), p. 14.

¹⁸ Pailin, *God and the Processes of Reality*, p. 140.

According to process theologians, the process is valuable in and of itself, because no temporal and earthly beauty can come close to satisfying desire for eternal love and beauty. Instead, the process 'reveals the presence ... of an unconditioned non-temporal source of value'¹⁹ that can only be God. Whitehead 'shows the presence of God...within man's consciousness, effectively directing man's pursuit of civilisation even in the face of tragedy'.²⁰ This doctrine of God's influence on creation is a way of unifying two doctrines, namely man's creative freedom to bring about his own destiny in the universe, and God's presence in life, 'preserving both the uniqueness of God's actuality and the uniqueness of man's freedom'.²¹ For process theology then, the 'subjective aim' and subsequent 'persuasion' to follow it are the marks of God's presence in the world and his presence within each individual, as well as signs of human independence and capacity to choose to improve the world.

The constant presence of God in process theology comes through the 'prehension' of memories from the past and the self-creativity and 'subjective aim' that are held in the present that both influence 'concrecence'. Process theology views the driving factor behind both of these processes to be the presence of God, as all memories from the past are utilised in the 'divinely received call forward',²² a call that is persuasive rather than coercive, and one that enables human beings to develop 'novel possibilities' through their creative synthesis to establish a hopeful, rather than a pre-destined future. The 'hopeful' element in this future of course contains some aspects of doubt. But 'the theist is sustained by his confident expectation that if we as creatures all have faith in God, that is, rely on his guidance, trusting him sufficiently to actualise the good which he proposes as novel possibility, then the good will triumph'.²³

For Whitehead, anticipation of the future might exist, but each moment is a complete entity in itself, as the process of becoming in each occasion creates a definite, individual moment that innately contains its own meaning. There is no need to look forward to an ultimate end as present meaning is 'forever definite'.²⁴

God's presence therefore exists in history to prepare humankind for the guaranteed end. However, the focus of process thought is on guiding men and women to self-completion. The presence of God is clear for all to discern.

¹⁹ Walter E Stokes, in Brown, Reeves et al (eds), *Process Philosophy and Christian Thought*, p. 261.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 260.

²¹ Ibid., p. 245.

²² Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*, p. 29.

²³ Lewis Ford, 'Divine Persuasion and the Triumph of Good', in Brown, Reeves, et al (eds), *Process Philosophy and Christian Thought*, p. 297.

²⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, I, p. 60.

Process theology in no way neglects the theme of hope for the future. The hope that is gained from God's presence in each 'concrecence' is amplified when his presence within the world as a whole is examined. Not only is the path of each individual influenced by God, the general path of the world as a whole is under his guidance. As before, this is not the exercise of ultimate control over each minute direction that the world takes, as this would erode the essential freedoms that characterise human nature. Hence, there is the middle ground between an imminent and transcendent God as described above, a God who is the sole Creator of history and has total control over it. Whitehead's definition of religion is of 'a system of general truths which have the effect of transforming character when they are sincerely held and vividly apprehended'.²⁵ Whitehead's interpreters have described this view of religion as one that primarily involves the 'cleansing and developing'²⁶ of character, through the effect of understanding and living out its truths. Perhaps the most important element in this process is the 'wider conscious reaction of men to the universe in which they find themselves'.²⁷ Life can be viewed as a hollow existence that ultimately has no meaning, or the existence of God can be embraced and human character can develop accordingly. Whatever people decide, Whitehead's images of God as 'the poet of the world', and particularly as 'the great companion – the fellow sufferer who understands'²⁸ reveals the fact that God has chosen to guide, and have a relationship with, human beings. As Pittenger puts it, God 'cannot be seen in abstraction from the world he loves'.²⁹

According to Whitehead, God possesses two natures, the primordial and the consequential. God's primordial nature is the 'divine awareness of all genuine possibilities'.³⁰ As human beings go through the process of 'prehension' and 'concrecence', they recognise theoretically and conceptually the range of possibilities that could come to fruition in the next moment. However, in his primordial, divine nature, God has more than just a conceptual recognition of these possibilities. He has a complete knowledge of every individual state and occasion that could succeed the current one regardless of how small the difference between them. God's primordial nature is representative of God's divinity and permanence, and also makes him 'the ground of the creative potentiality of the processes of reality'.³¹ In other words, the 'subjective aim' that human beings hold through which they are innately striving toward an ideal

²⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

²⁶ Pailin, *God and the Processes of Reality*, p. 57.

²⁷ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 31.

²⁸ Whitehead, quoted in Pailin, *God and the Processes of Reality*, p. 59.

²⁹ Pittenger, *Process Thought and Christian Faith*, p. 22.

³⁰ Pailin, *God and the Processes of Reality*, p. 60.

³¹ Ibid., p. 62.

comes from God and his primordial nature. The consequent nature of God places him, for all of this divinity and permanence, into the same category as human beings and any other living thing on the planet, in that he too 'prehends' the actions of everything on the earth as they go through the process of 'concrecence'. Hence, everything that goes through 'concrecence' has an effect on God. This is because in the process theology system, everything is relative and affects everything else. God is not exempt from this system, and so every action that is taken on earth affects him in some way, and is felt by him. In Whitehead's own terminology, they are 'absorbed' into his nature. This process represents 'the dynamic effort of the world passing into everlasting unity, and of the static majesty of God's vision, accomplishing its purpose of completion by absorption of the world's multiplicity of effort'.³² This does not have an effect on his divinity, but must have an effect on the way in which God has knowledge of the concrete possibilities that can possibly come out of every occasion. But this does not have any effect on the uniqueness and individuality of each occasion, despite innumerable occasions being absorbed by God at any one time. Indeed, the fact that these occasions are 'remembered' by God are what give each of them significance. This adds greater resonance to Whitehead's claim that God is 'the fellow-sufferer who understands', because God is constantly present and effectively living on earth with humanity.

Hence, God is an active participant in the world because 1) God has a consequent nature in the same way as humans; 2) this means he goes through the process of concrecence; 3) he therefore changes by absorbing the actions of people on earth into his nature, which does not affect his divinity; 4) Most importantly, God will continue to absorb and influence human action.

Panentheism

Whereas pantheism broadly defines the presence of God in the world, panentheism defines the presence of the world in God. In other words, every element of God's creation works through him and exists 'in' him, but crucially maintains its own independence. This is a major contrast to both 'classical' theism, which asserts the complete independence of God from the world, and pantheism, which conversely denies the independence of God from the world, and holds that nothing can happen without God. Hence, panentheism straddles the line between placing God entirely outside the world, whilst still maintaining its independence. The two are not the same, and yet they are intimately related to each other.

Again, human beings have true independence, but not at the expense of God's

³² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 529.

presence in the world. This kind of presence is represented by the presence of instances that are 'indicative of the total structure and the dynamic of God's operation'.³³ The existence of morality, according to Pittenger, is one such instance. It is a particularly apt example, as people's morality enables actions of novelty in humanity that are decided independently and not controlled by any external entity. The actions therefore form a part of the world, and they can also be examined as a way of understanding the singular direction towards which God is drawing the world. This is not just true of moral decisions, or even of decisions in general. It could also be true of random mutations and combinations of genes that lead to long-term evolutionary processes. These instances could genuinely happen by chance, and yet overall control of the direction of the world could still be held by God. Hartshorne himself held that the mutations that lead to natural selection and evolution are merely the result of fortuitous combinations.³⁴ However, God still affects these fundamental processes so that the evolution of the world remains stable, and yet a high chance of complex interaction remains.

The natural end result of such a worldview is that the specific situations and events that develop are not the direct responsibility of God. The potential depths to which the world can sink could be the result of human beings turning away from their subjective aim, or the natural result of random occurrences at molecule level. In either case, there will always be hope as God will retain his constant love for humankind and continue to oversee the positive development of the world until it fulfils his ultimate purpose. Hence, 'God incorporates within the divine being all the experiences which constitute the world while having an identity as a self-conscious being which is significantly separate from and able to respond to the contingent processes of the world'.³⁵

God's presence in the world has major ramifications for human action and for the direction in which the world is moving. As God is immediately present in the world, it is possible to experience his presence through the actions that people take as a result of 'prehending' God.

The problem of evil

The subject of the presence of evil in the world is one that many theologians throughout the centuries have attempted to tackle. Process theology addresses the issue primarily through emphasizing that there is always real choice in every occasion of life, and the possibility of novelty is continuously present, that humans occasionally choose to err from their subjective aims and follow a path

³³ Pittenger, *Process Thought and Christian Faith*, p. 42.

³⁴ Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1984), p. 68.

³⁵ Pailin, *God and the Processes of Reality*, p. 81.

that God has not persuaded them to follow.

As mentioned above, God has no foreknowledge of the events that will actually occur, and the world is a dynamic and unpredictable place. Therefore, it is possible for evil to occur. The choice to do evil does affect God, but it does not change the way in which he operates. As Pittenger affirms, 'it is characteristic of God, in his "consequent" aspect, to take into himself all that has in fact occurred ... all is accepted by God and in one way or another can be used by him ... ceaselessly working towards the most widely shared good'.³⁶ In other words, good can arise from evil through God, because he can use evil events to create opportunities for genuine good to take place in the future. Process, through God, naturally creates hope out of everything. This would not be enough for critics like Ely, who ultimately believes that the process system completely devalues the very real presence of evil in the world, because 'what is itself evil [for process theology] performs a good function and hence helps to make up a valuable whole'.³⁷ In other words, he believes that process theology is so concerned with the transformation of the present that it disregards evil as a force in the world entirely, as it is absorbed and thus neutralised.

However, there is a significant difference between saying that evil happenings can be made into happenings from which some good may emerge, and saying that it does not matter what humans do, because the outcome will always end up being a good one. The former is the view of Whitehead, whereas the latter is Ely's interpretation. God wills humanity not to do evil, and suffers with human beings when evil is done. It is true that an evil action cannot be undone and has a lasting effect on the world, but as a forward-looking doctrine, process theology is concerned with how the future can be reshaped for the better so the ramifications of evil are not as strongly felt. This can be done without underestimating the impact of evil in general. Cobb and Griffin would agree with this assessment, with one of their main conclusions being that 'process theology rediscovers the notion of God acting in this world as a representation of his love for this world'.³⁸ In other words, God guides human beings to the option of choosing the best possibility, but this does not mean that they will choose it. The hope of process theology is that God continues to be present throughout all decisions. He does not bring about apocalyptic situations because he 'can only produce such order as is possible'³⁹ in his role as the persuader of the world. It is the human race, and specifically the combinations of their collective decisions that can lead to the downfall of the world.

³⁶ Pittenger, *Process Thought and Christian Faith*, p. 32.

³⁷ Stephen Ely, *The Religious Availability of Whitehead's God* (Madison, WN: University of Wisconsin Press, 1942), p. 38.

³⁸ Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*, p.51.

³⁹ Alfred N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), p. 189.

The initial premise about the process response to the problem of evil, then, is one that pervades the doctrine of process theology as a whole. God constantly influences his creations to perform good actions, and therefore to turn away from evil. When evil occurs, God 'prehends' the changes that have been made and continues to influence people for the general good of the world. This initial premise is frequently mistaken for one that means evil taking place in the world is somehow acceptable, because it will always play a part in the future good. In truth, evil is no more seen as a 'good' thing in process theology than it is in other forms of theology. In process theology, God never desires evil and seeks to avoid it. The 'prehensions' that are performed by both God and human beings after an evil event will direct the world down the right path as much as they can do, but they do not come close to justifying or giving understanding to the evil event itself. Indeed, the event itself and the 'prehensions' that follow should be considered to be completely separate. Any evil event is a misstep in the process of endless 'prehensions' and 'concrescences' that take place in the world, influenced by God, which continue after the event has happened.

So what then, of the event itself? Process theologians are very clear about the freedom of individuals. Despite the influence of God, human beings have the freedom to ignore this influence if they so wish. It is clear, then, that an evil event in itself is caused entirely by human beings. God wills men and women not to turn away from him, and if they do it is a tragedy that has no redeeming features, that results in evil actions taking place in the world. The continued 'prehensions' and 'concrescences' that follow this form a recovery from this event, therefore the event in itself is in no way a good thing, even if good things may eventually transpire from it. The subsequent good things that come out of it take place as a result of God's continued influence, and the decisions of human beings to follow their 'prehension' of him – or to follow his persuasion that they should pursue the good. It is the proposition of classical theology that God is willing to tolerate necessary evil in order to invest in a greater future.⁴⁰ The doctrine of process theology states that it is all within human hands.

The clash between the theodicy of process theology and the theodicies of non-process theology concerns this particular issue; to what extent human beings are in control of their actions?⁴¹ The issue has clear implications for the problem of evil as if human beings do have full control of their actions, then they are largely responsible for events, both good and evil, that take place in the world. Hence, it would be erroneous to suggest that God has willed these events to take place in

⁴⁰ David Basinger, *Divine Power in Process Theism: A Philosophical Critique* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1988), p. 56.

⁴¹ Schubert Ogden, 'Evil and Belief in God: The Distinctive Relevance of Process Theology', in *The Perkins School of Theology Journal* (Vol. 31, Summer 1978), pp. 21-34.

any way. For process theologians, all evil is both genuine and unnecessary. Evil actions are separate from the world that God has created for humans to live in, and this is reflected in his presence with human beings and persuasion of them not to do evil. This persuasion does not infringe free will. Process theologians would argue that God's omnipotence is also not compromised, because of his ability to influence any given situation. However, his control over humanity is not direct. On the other hand, if human beings were not truly in control of their decisions because God was working within them further, to the extent that he was ultimately controlling their actions, then free will becomes an illusion, while God retains his omnipotence. Unless it is argued that evil is somehow necessary, and has an ultimate, final purpose that is invisible at this present time, a theodicy has to include some explanation of how God's omnipotence and free will (to perform or not to perform evil actions) can be reconciled. The theodicy proposed by process theology provides an attempt to do this. However, it could be asked whether the basic tenets of process theology are required to be accepted in order to formulate a convincing theodicy. 'Classical theists' might argue that God's influence over earthly affairs is not strong enough to warrant being called 'omnipotent', and that process theology introduces more difficulties with regards to evil than it does solutions.

Conclusions

A number of points that relate hope to process theology have been examined in this paper, namely 1) that process theology enables anybody to choose their individual state of being at any individual moment. The realisation of this liberates them from the false sense of constant self-identity that humans construct for themselves and enables them to live with others as a community. 2) God is continuously and intimately involved in his creation and guiding humanity through all its occasions. This happens in both the short-term and the long-term through the process of 'persuasion'. As such, everyone has the innate knowledge of God's will for humanity, but this will does not have to be followed. 3) Human beings are aware of this persuasion at the level of their pre-reflective experience, even if they are not actively conscious of it, or even of a belief in God. Hence, people are naturally inclined towards following God's will. 4) The good actions that are performed in this life will in time be delivered back to the world as they are absorbed into heaven, meaning that anything that people are 'persuaded' by God to do contributes to the ultimate beneficial process of the world. 5) Conversely, any evil that takes place in the world, or even any 'setbacks' that affect God's ultimate plan, are absorbed by God who goes on to bring good out of any situation. 6) The nature of God is such that he is both the ultimate Creator of the world and innately present within it. Human beings therefore have true independence and define themselves, and yet God is present throughout their experiences, guiding the world omnisciently to the best possible outcome even if

this is invisible within the present moment. Finally 7) Innate knowledge of the processes of the world involve a knowledge and inclination towards community with others.